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Marybeth Poder

University of Tennessee - Knoxville, mpoder@vols.utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Marybeth Poder entitled "Manufacturing Coalition: Cooperation, Solidarity, and Sisterhood in the New York Women's Trade Union League, 1906-1919." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Michael Keene, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Kirsten Benson, Lisa King, Ernest Freeberg

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Manufacturing Coalition: Cooperation, Solidarity, and Sisterhood in the New York
Women's Trade Union League: 1906-1919

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Marybeth Poder

December 2014

Abstract

This dissertation examines how the rhetorical postures of coalition within the meeting minutes, officers' reports, and Annual Reports of the New York Women's Trade Union League between 1906 and 1919 contributed to the League's ability to overcome the many economic, cultural, ideological, and gender differences that acted as barriers to their unified action to improve the lives and working conditions of women wage earners. Within the Literature Review and Methodology section, I first explore the scholarly roots of my project in recent rhetorical and women's historiographic endeavors as well as in the work of labor and feminist historians, and then turn my attention to the methods and methodology I employed as I approached the archives of the New York League. In the Historical Context section, I discuss, well, the historical context surrounding the emergence of the League and the reform traditions that inspired it, as well as looking at several of the major events within their early history that played out in the documents I am examining. The next three chapters, Cooperation, Solidarity, and Sisterhood, are structured as Findings chapters similar to what one would find in a qualitative research project. As such, they contain, essentially, a guided tour through the records of the League highlighting the places where the League attempted to evoke feelings of cooperation, solidarity, and sisterhood in their members through their calculated presentation of events, an act I am referring to as rhetorical posturing. Finally, in the Discussion section, I consider several important landmarks along that guided tour within the larger context of other scholarly work on the League, both in terms of the historical and theoretical grounding of the League's words and our interpretations of them with a nod toward potential future research.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review and Methodology

Literature Review

Before I can begin to examine the rhetorical activities that helped make successful cross-class, inter-cultural alliances possible for the New York Women's Trade Union League, it is important to look at the scholarship that has been expanding the scope of rhetorical studies, making possible this study of meeting minutes and other club records, whose seemingly dry and mundane genre would traditionally have made them appear as unlikely sources for rich rhetorical inquiry. Nan Johnson has claimed that "the boundaries around rhetorical space have been actively patrolled for as long as it has been undeniably clear that to speak well and write convincingly were the surest routes to political, economic, and cultural stature" (2). By limiting access to the traditional and obvious rhetorical spaces like the bar, the podium, and the pulpit, rhetorical power could be concentrated in the hands of a powerful elite of white men, generally, while women, minorities, and other non-elites were left without recourse to change their plight. Or so it seems, if one were to consider only the accomplishments recorded in rhetoric textbooks and anthologies of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. However, much of the rhetorical scholarship of the last thirty years has been devoted to uncovering and rediscovering the many examples of where and how these less powerful groups employed rhetorical strategies to further their own political and cultural agendas in unexpected places through nontraditional means.

In particular, mapping out the rhetorical practices of women throughout history has become increasingly popular among scholars in rhetoric. Beginning with Doris G. Yoakum's "Women's Introduction to the American Platform" in *A History and Criticism of American*

Public Address (1943) and Lillian O'Connor's *Pioneer Women Orators: Rhetoric in the Antebellum Reform Movement* (1954), this trend really began to pick up steam with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (1989). In all three cases, the focus was on women who had been public speakers in the traditional sense, but who had, for whatever reason, been left out of the more mainstream historical record. This focus on anthologies continued in the early days of feminist rhetoric as scholars scrambled to recover "primary acts of public persuasion by women" (Ronald 142) with works like Catherine Hobbs' *Nineteenth Century Women Learn to Write* (1995), Andrea Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition* (1995), Shirley Wilson Logan's *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth Century African-American Women* (1995), and Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (1997). This practice of reclamation has met with some resistance, however, most notably from Barbara Biesecker in her article "Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric" (1992). She feared that searching out those women who had managed to gain access to traditional oratory might act as a means of promoting "female tokenism" that inadvertently reinforced the elitist values of the received rhetorical tradition (142-43), and some of the early missteps in the scholarship, such as privileging Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony over other suffrage crusaders who were later shown to be more influential ("Telling" 101) would seem to support this fear. She claims instead that for feminist historiographers "interested in rewriting the history of Rhetoric, the plurality of practices that together constitute the everyday must be conceptualized as a key site of social transformation and, hence, of rhetorical analysis" (157).

Patricia Bizzell, however, saw both as necessary and worthy approaches to feminist research arguing for looking both “for women who have done work similar to the work done by the traditionally canonized male authors [framing] arguments for inserting these women into the traditional history and setting their work in dialogue with the canon” and for “places not previously studied for work by women that would not have been traditionally considered as rhetoric [framing] arguments redefining the whole notion of rhetoric in order to include this new work by women” (51). Most feminist rhetorical scholars of the late 1990s and 2000s have expanded our understanding of the tradition by using a combination of both approaches: listening for the voices of previously ignored people groups while redefining what counts as rhetorical performance. As Carol Mattingly admonishes, “we must continue to question the stories handed down to us, and even those we have helped to create. We necessarily needed time to examine a broader range of texts, and to examine our own prejudices, in order to recognize that a vast number of women were dissatisfied with their unequal treatment during the nineteenth century and took effective rhetorical means for addressing their displeasure” (“Telling” 102).

As Mattingly mentions, the nineteenth century has proven to be an incredibly fruitful period to explore in this regard because of the widespread involvement of women in social change movements like abolition, temperance, and suffrage, as well as in issues of public health and safety, despite the cultural and legal constraints on their access to public and political forums. This combination led to many creative accommodations, if not always to perfect success, that are well worth exploring. For example, Mattingly in *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002) demonstrates the immense impact dress had on the receptiveness of an audience toward women orators in a way never experienced by

their male counterparts, and Lindal Buchanan further expands on this concept of constraints on stage performance in *Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and Antebellum Women Rhetors* (2005) in which she argues that to fully appreciate a woman orator's performance, we must consider five factors that contributed to its possibility: education, access, "feminine" v. "masculine" delivery styles, childbearing, and collaboration. Other scholars have strayed further from the podium with works like Nan Johnson's *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910* (2002), which delves into the world of parlor rhetorics, such as conduct literature and letter writing manuals, wrestling with their seeming promise to provide rhetorical fluency and power that is hampered by an insistence that these skills once acquired ought only to be employed toward domestic ends; Jane Donawerth's *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition* (2011) which looks at conversation as a parallel rhetorical art with separate rules and expectations from those of public oratory; or Jessica Enoch's "A Woman's Place is in the School: Rhetorics of Gendered Space in Nineteenth-Century America" (2008) which considers how the nineteenth-century school was transformed discursively and materially from a masculine to a feminine space.

These works, and many others like them, have opened the doors for research like my own into previously un[der]explored aspects of and sites for rhetorical activity. Indeed, Kate Ronald in her article "Feminist Perspectives on the History of Rhetoric" specifically called for more work to be done on the twentieth century, especially in regard to political rhetoric (145), and an exploration of the New York League allows for both, as this cross-class alliance of women (and men) from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds came together in 1904 in order to remake both the workplace and the legislation that governed it. Of course, others have studied

the WTUL before me, as it has figured in both feminist and labor histories, though these previous works did not examine the group through the terministic screen of rhetoric. Coverage of the national WTUL as well as the New York branch found its way into such works as Nancy Schrom Dye's "Creating a Feminist Alliance: Sisterhood and Class Conflict in the New York Women's Trade Union League, 1903-1914" (1975) and *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (1980), Philip S. Foner's *Women and the American Labor Movement: From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I* (1979), Norbert C. Seldon's collection *The World of Women's Trade Unionism: Comparative Historical Essays* (1985), and Robin Miller Jacoby's *The British and American Women's Trade Union Leagues, 1890-1925: A Case Study of Feminism and Class* (1994). Additionally, historians interested in specific members of the WTUL have given fairly in depth coverage of the group as a whole through projects like Elizabeth Anne Payne's *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreir Robins and the Women's Trade Union League* (1988), which focused on the League's most influential National President, and Annalise Orleck's *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (1995), which explored the lives of four working Jewish women who were all members of the League at one point in time.

Women's groups in general from this time period have also increasingly come under the scrutinizing gaze of scholars. While Wendy B. Sharer has pointed out that "despite their achievements during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, such women's organizations are in danger of being overlooked by scholars in the history of rhetoric, partly because historians have established the period from suffrage to the 1960s as a time of decline" ("Disintegrating" 124), many, like Sharer, are beginning to realize that the work of

women's clubs was not primarily social, involving "teas, shopping outings, crafts, and other social activities," as we might have assumed, but encompassed such clearly political interests as "reforming international affairs, studying political history, and advancing career opportunities for women" (*Vote 2*). Both Karen Blair's *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (1980) and her helpful guide *Joining In: Exploring the History of Voluntary Organizations* (2006) make the case for women's clubs as a fruitful site for historical exploration. Indeed, scholars like Kristi Andersen and Elizabeth Clemens have explored how the rhetorical strategies employed by women's clubs both before and after suffrage, such as lobbying, are not only interesting in and of themselves but have also seriously impacted how politics in general work in the U.S, and Robyn Muncy has discussed the mixed legacy that Progressive women reformers left for later generations of women in this country through the policies, court rulings, and protective legislation they implemented in the decades around 1900.

The dividing line of suffrage is clearly an important consideration for these studies, as can be seen just by a look at the dates included in many of their titles. While some see suffrage as a clear break in the workings of these associations, with claims like Blair's that "when women began to attain broader political and social rights in the 1920s, including the social acceptance to attend college, build careers, and participate in government, they found satisfaction in new arenas and did not gravitate to club life as certainly as they had previously, when other venues were closed to them" (*Joining 29*), others, such as Nancy Cott, argue for a more nuanced view that acknowledges the continuity of women's political activities both before and after 1920 (85). As a women's group that spans the pre/post-suffrage era, the WTUL affords an excellent opportunity to continue to explore both the changes and the continuities in women's political

strategies and the rhetorical activities that underpin them during that time, though my focus is on how their overall coalition-building strategies and specific attitude toward suffrage developed leading up to and just beyond the granting of suffrage to the women of the state of New York in 1917.

Further support for my research approach can be found in the work of Anne Ruggles Gere, though her focus is on literacy rather than rhetoric. She argues forcefully for the validity of studying women's clubs in her book *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (1997), framing out quite eloquently what I see as the struggles and purpose of my own project when she claims:

Examining the cultural work of women's clubs poses special challenges because it calls on a past that can never be entirely recovered. Traces can be found, however, in the written records left by these organizations because they document the thinking, the circulation of ideas, and the textual labor that both underlay and responded to changes in national life. Such records show clubwomen making their own history and defining their own cultural identity. (2)

I attempt to answer this challenge in my dissertation by examining the meeting minutes and officers' reports of the New York branch of the League over a thirteen-year period looking for evidence of this history and cultural identity building. Of course, the partial loss of this past that she speaks of highlights one of the potential dangers of archival work, namely, that we only see what is preserved in the archive and, as Mattingly has pointed out, "what is selected for inclusion in collections reflects and often perpetuates existing notions of what is valuable" (Disintegrating 121). The silver lining to this issue in a well documented archive like that of the New York

WTUL, however, is that what was deemed valuable to club members can give a clearer idea of how they wished to be remembered, which speaks directly to my interest in how they fashioned themselves and fostered coalition through their records. Furthermore, in discussing instances where other association records describe lengthy debates about naming clubs, which indicates that women were well aware of the implications of calling themselves girls versus women or women versus ladies, and in claiming that “clubwomen in all social locations used print to fashion themselves and their organizations . . . creat[ing] an alternative to the male-controlled mass market in which women could only rarely present themselves in their own terms” (29), Gere clearly lends support to my theory that the women of the WTUL were actively engaged in a sort of rhetorical posturing, using their words, actions, events, and affiliations to build varying images of themselves in an effort to bring the many different groups represented in the League’s membership together into a cohesive unit, or, more accurately, into several different cohesive units over time.

My concept of rhetorical posturing draws heavily on Lawrence J. Prelli’s discussion of rhetorical display, but with a greater emphasis on those displays that constitute identity, both individual and collective. As Prelli describes them, “displays are manifested rhetorically in the demonstration of a scientific finding, of a political grievance, of a preferred identity. In whatever manifestation, displays also anticipate a responding audience whose expectations might be satisfied or frustrated, their values and interests affirmed, neglected, or challenged” (1). He goes on to state that “displays are rhetorical because the meanings they manifest before situated audiences result from selective processes and, thus, constitute partial perspectives with political, social, or cultural implications” (11). Finally, he claims that “people do demonstrate or act out

preferred identities and conceptions of self through words and deeds that enact, with varying degrees of virtuosity, self-portrayals exhibiting the ‘right’ attitudes and feelings or proving the ‘right’ commitments and allegiances” (15). Following his lead then, I will attempt to reawaken the “tensions contingently resolved through those selective processes . . . exploring how those situated resolutions conceal even as they reveal, what meanings they leave absent even as they make others present, whose interests they mute as well as whose they emphasize, what they condemn as well as celebrate” (11). I hope by practicing Jacqueline Jones Royster’s “critical imagination” I will be able “to recognize small pieces of a puzzle as meaningful” (12) and see where the WTUL’s records of their everyday activities reveal the rhetorical choices club members made in creating their preferred group identities.

Through a different line of reasoning, Sharer’s work *Vote and Voice: Women’s Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930* (2004) also provides justification for my focus on documents such as meeting minutes, annual reports, and officers’ reports rather than public addresses they may have given as she points out that “while the texts that generate notable public response and that have widespread impact when they are produced or delivered certainly deserve a place in histories of rhetoric, it is also important to remember the preceding rhetorical practices that cultivated a responsive audience for those texts” (6). This cultivation of responsive audiences is important, for as Mattingly has observed, “women who successfully negotiated images that helped to construct an accepted public image for women effected changes beyond those for their reform causes. Their rhetorical acumen also prompted changes in the way women - and their claim to a public presence - were perceived” (“Telling” 107). In the case of meeting minutes and club reports, however, the members themselves are the primary intended audience,

as they are the ones who will be listening to the reading of them during their meetings, and the group identity(ies) that these documents helped to create influenced the ways that these members perceived themselves as rhetorical performers, agents for social change, and worthy partners with other groups in the labor and woman movements. As Gere claimed about the clubwomen she studied, “the literacy practices that generated and sustained their national publications [which were still generally only seen by other club members] enabled clubwomen to see themselves as part of a larger whole, strengthening their perception of their own power to effect changes and increasing their feelings of connection to one another” (10). In this light, the routine procedures guiding the progression of each meeting and the passage of resolutions and the language and tropes employed during those proceedings can be seen as being as important in revealing what club members value and wish to emulate and enact as their more obviously rhetorical writings and performances because those routines helped to shape their sense of identity as a group ready and able to meet the many challenges they faced in their reform efforts.

Elsewhere, Sharer also argues in favor of studying the types of materials I am using for this project when she says:

Further examination of the handbooks and public-relations documents of women’s organizations from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s might provide valuable insights into how women in these organizations negotiated their roles in the face of an oppressive cultural climate. Study of records and publications might reveal how women’s organizations worked both with and against local male-dominated political structures. How did these women respond to and adjust their rhetoric to the mostly male law-making bodies that were frequently their audiences? How did they temper their activism as a result of the

sexist environment in which they operated (for example, through the rhetoric of ‘municipal housekeeping’)? How did they both reinforce and counter popular stereotypes like those painfully illustrated in the *New Yorker* cartoons? (Disintegrating 133)

While my focus is on the first two decades of the twentieth century, these questions are still begging to be answered with an eye toward the identity-creating aspects of rhetorical display, and through my analysis of the papers of the New York WTUL, I will do just that.

Methodology

As I attempt to answer these questions, I have been careful to consider my methods and methodology with the help of the archival researchers in rhetoric who have gone before me. As these scholars moved out from the more traditional focus on the text of a clearly defined rhetorical performance into the culture, time, place, and even bodies of their subjects, they discovered new ethical dilemmas that must be addressed. Neal Lerner points out that “archival research is not merely about the artifacts to be found but is ultimately about the people who have played a role in creating and using those artifacts, whether their authors, their subjects, their collectors, their donators, their readers, or a host of other players in the social worlds represented” (196). As a result, the researcher must consider “How do my personal and professional experiences shape the questions I ask, the archives I research, the methods and methodologies I choose, and the conclusions I draw? Why is it important to research the details of this person’s or this community’s life and writings? Does what I am doing or planning to do have value and benefit beyond my personal interest and, if so, to whom?” (McKee 65), much as they would if they were engaging in qualitative research with living persons.

In terms of my own research, and in answer to Barbara L'Eplattenier's call that "our own subjectivity needs to be more specifically acknowledged within our metaphors so that we have a space in which to talk about how we developed our research agenda and interests" (137), I must acknowledge that I find the League intriguing because I, too, so often have to negotiate tenuous alliances across class and cultural divides. I do so as a scholar from a working-class background, who has enjoyed both the privileged position of a well-funded graduate student and the precarious life of a contingent faculty member; as a working mother, who has had to face the realities of limited access to affordable childcare and health benefits as well as the joy that comes with children; as a former recipient of state benefits like WIC and Medicaid, who has been incredibly grateful for them but also felt shamed by the virulent animosity to such programs (and those who are seen to abuse them) that comes from those who feel they are unfairly forced to fund them as well as others who have (virtuously) received them in the past; and as a Christian with a fondness for science and socialism, who daily interacts with those who adamantly believe that the three are incompatible, with some one or the other of them being the most virtuous or heinous things imaginable. As an individual, I have felt the need to carefully construct my identity, both through my more formal rhetorical acts such as my scholarly work, and more extensively through my online presence, which acts as a written record of my daily activities, interests, and allegiances, much as the meeting minutes did for the League, in order to maintain friendly relations with people representing these various experiences and ideologies. It's not that I have created a Facebook profile to be a cover for my secret, "real" life, but that I use that profile as a tool for connecting with a wide variety of people, all of whom I like and value despite our differences in opinion, and find Facebook is most effective for doing this when I

emphasize the common ground I share with others and avoid aligning myself too closely with the more polarizing aspects of any given group or topic.

Certainly, the work I have done over the past year-and-a-half as I have poured myself into this dissertation has influenced and clarified my thinking in regard to my own rhetorical posturing online and in my life in general, but I doubt I would have been quite so quick to see the successful alliance building of the League over the obstacles they faced and the failures they experienced if I weren't already inclined to seek common ground and act as a peacemaker of sorts among the diverse communities who have contributed to my own identity. I do hope, however, that the insights I have gained through a close scrutiny of the rhetorical forms of coalition building that the League engaged in will prove helpful to others as well as myself, not only as an indication of how one might maintain a drama-free social media account, but far more importantly, how we might work together across the cultural divides we face in our professional lives or in activist work in order to facilitate cooperation and, perhaps, social change.

Along with attention to how our personal experiences and preferences guide our inquiries, recent researchers have called for a greater awareness of our understandings of time and our relationship to it and how that shapes our approaches to research and research subjects (McKee 73). This means recognizing our preconceived notions regarding an era we might study as well as examining how the preferences and priorities of our own time might be shaping how we perceive that of others. Again returning to Mattingly, she describes the process she underwent of repeatedly finding references to the work of women in the temperance movement before finally realizing their sophisticated and radical approaches to abolishing domestic abuse and instituting legal reforms leading to the more equitable treatment of women. Because the

prevailing opinion of such women was that they were uptight kill-joys, it was difficult to see them as forwarding an agenda that any contemporary feminist might embrace. Once she did see their potential, however, she discovered a wealth of evidence in the archives to support their importance to the history of women's rhetorical performances ("Telling" 103).

One method of overcoming the pitfalls of time is to follow the advice of Lynne Lewis Gaillet in the recent *CCC* special issue on research methods, that "archival researchers must immerse themselves in study of the place, time, and culture they are researching. Talking with members of the community when possible, broadly reading any contemporary materials, addressing pertinent issues of time and place, and triangulating data so that claims have merit are essential in representing cultures and communities" (44). I discovered, for instance, that I needed a solid grounding in both the labor movement and Progressivism as a whole in order to fairly interpret what the WTUL members were trying to accomplish, so I relied heavily on texts like David Montgomery's *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, Robert H. Wiebe's *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, Daniel T. Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, Ileen A. DeVault's *United Apart: Gender and the Rise of Craft Unionism*, and A.T. Lane's *Solidarity or Survival? American Labor and European Immigrants, 1830-1924* to flesh out the background beyond what the specific histories of the WTUL could provide. In doing so, I hope to have corrected many of the misconceptions I had previously held about that period in history so that I better achieve what Jami L. Calacio describes, "as I 'enter into the text' of 'the other,' I must allow it to speak to me, to wash over me, and to take me to another place as yet uncharted, refusing to quell its voice with my own assumptions" (132). Additionally, since my study is an in depth examination of a

fairly specific, though substantial, piece of the archival record for the League, I make ample use of Nancy Schrom Dye's works, as she helped to prepare the New York League's archive for microfilm and is able to fill in some of the historical gaps that the brevity of meeting minutes and League reports make inevitable.

Given these limitations, one might wonder why I chose to focus on the meeting minutes, officers' reports, and annual reports of the League rather than, say, the personal letters of various League members, which other scholars have found so helpful. To begin with, I came to this study following a course in women's historiography, during which we had discussed the conflict discussed above regarding female tokenism, and another course regarding social change movements, which emphasized again and again the importance of collective over individual action, so I was biased against any method of study that would privilege the actions or viewpoints of individual League members over their communal accomplishments. I was determined to discover a method of examining their collective rhetorical acts, and as Sharer's encouragement "to remember the preceding rhetorical practices that cultivated a responsive audience" (6) worked its way deeper into my thinking, I found that the official records of the League offered an intriguing window into such routine practices, one which had generally been overlooked by rhetorical scholars yet promised to open up new insights to any attentive observer interested in coalition building within "official" groups like the League who adopt parliamentary procedure. Additionally, as I became immersed in the activities and impact of the League, and the cultural climate in which they emerged, the primary research question that developed for me could be best answered by the information available in these documents.

That research question, put simply, is given the class, ethnic, and gender barriers to unified action that the League faced and that they absolutely had to overcome in order to be successful in their attempts to improve the lot of women workers, what rhetorical practices helped enable them to construct working fictions of identification and coalition? Essentially, throughout the secondary materials I read concerning the League, and then in the League records themselves, I kept seeing statements regarding the diverse make-up of the League's membership and the tensions that arose out of their attempts to rise above their differences and work together. To illustrate, Dye comments that, "although the League went further than any other women's organization in establishing sustained relations with working women and in grappling with the problems a feminist alliance posed, its internal affairs were rarely harmonious" ("Creating" 36) and Orleck notes that "Socialists distrusted their work with upper-crust women reformers. Union men were either indifferent or openly hostile to working women's attempts to become leaders in the labor movement. And the League women often seemed to Schneiderman and O'Reilly to act out of a patronizing benevolence that had little to do with real coalition building" (43). While the secondary materials talked of intense infighting, frequent squabbles, and personal enmity, however, the records tended to minimize conflicts, presenting instead a picture of usually unanimous decisions with orderly discussion and responsible handling of those differences that did arise.

As I ruminated on the stark contrast between the descriptions of League interactions given by individual members in their (often heated) personal correspondence with friends and the far more sedate ones found in the official record, I came back to Prelli's idea that "displays are rhetorical because the meanings they manifest before situated audiences result from selective

processes and, thus, constitute partial perspectives with political, social, or cultural implications” (11). It began to become clear to me that, while one could explain away the homogenizing effect of something like meeting minutes as simply the genre conventions dictated by parliamentary procedure, doing so would miss one of the reasons, I would argue, that parliamentary procedure has been so widely adopted by so many collective bodies: those genre conventions encourage a sense of group identity that actively downplays individuals in favor of a coalition that comes into existence every time the meeting is called to order and fades every time the meeting adjourns. As Gere saw in her study of women’s clubs, “clubwomen must have disliked and disagreed with one another, but these difficulties were, for the most part, not recorded in the minutes. Instead, clubwomen used literacy to transcend conflicts and reinforce commonalities so that they could stay emotionally connected to one another despite differences in ideas and beliefs” (46). In the records of the League, we can see this coalition being created again and again, through myriad activities and associations, constantly being tweaked and nudged in one direction or another as members work out who and what their group is and is not through their actions and affiliations, but they always comes back to the formality and unifying power of parliamentary procedure that so forcefully declares that this group officially exists.

By looking at one of the most comprehensive and popular handbooks for parliamentary procedure, *Robert’s Rules of Order* (1915), which I accessed online at robertsrules.org, it is clear that the intended audience for the meeting minutes and officers’ reports of the League was primarily active members who attended their monthly meetings. As outlined in *Robert’s*, “These records are open, however, to inspection by any member at reasonable times, and where a committee needs any records of a society for the proper performance of its duties, they should be

turned over to its chairman. The same principle applies in boards and committees, their records being accessible to members of the board or committee, as the case may be, but to no others” (59). We can tell that they were not to be published for a wider audience because they generally failed to follow the protocol for published minutes, that is, to list “the speakers on each side of every question, with an abstract of all addresses, if not the addresses in full, when written copies are furnished” (60). Instead, they “record . . . the proceedings, stating what was done and not what was said . . . never making criticisms, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done” (59). Of course, in addition to being available to members for inspection upon request, these minutes and reports would be read, corrected if necessary, and approved during regular meetings. Through these readings, then, they acted as a self-approved history for the League. That fact makes them a doubly rich source for the material I am interested in, as they simultaneously record activities geared towards coalition building and, through their communal reading, became one of those activities.

Ultimately, then, I realized that the success the League found in overcoming the obstacles they faced due to class and cultural differences both within their ranks and with outside groups arose in part out of their ability to adopt rhetorical postures of coalition in their records that minimized differences and emphasized common ground. In order to achieve those postures in their interactions with others, they first needed to get their members to buy into them. The meeting minutes presented an excellent opportunity for the League to reinforce these postures since the minutes were read at the beginning of every meeting for the members who were present to approve. The minutes record both the League’s activities and affiliations, and (to some extent) their opinions on the same, but valuable evidence can also be found in the officers’ reports,

which, while certainly more one-sided and sometimes defensive because they are written by individuals, tend to flesh out some of the League's thinking underlying their activities and policies beyond the bare-bones brevity of the minutes. Additionally, for the years they are available, the League's annual reports offer another view of their rhetorical postures that differs slightly from the other sources as the audience for them is larger¹, including those members who support the League financially without necessarily being involved in their monthly meetings, with, consequently, a further motivation for playing up the united interests of all those involved with the League's work.

The rhetorical postures I will be focusing on in this dissertation were all geared towards building coalitions within the League by demonstrating both the unity of purpose that already existed among League members and that which existed between the League and the many other groups and individuals with whom they worked in order to organize women into trade unions, pass protective legislation, provide strike support, push the union label on various goods, provide educational opportunities, investigate unsafe or unsanitary factory conditions, promote suffrage, and various other projects aimed at improving the lives of working women. For the sake of easier analysis, I have divided them into the subcategories of cooperation, solidarity, and sisterhood, though the division is an artificial one and the three frequently blend into one another. In my chapter on cooperation, I focus on the way they record and discuss their direct actions in ways that bind them together, covering such subjects as their extensive work with striking women workers involving activities like picketing, conducting street meetings, and dissuading strike breakers. The solidarity chapter, on the other hand, deals primarily with their coverage of their

¹Based on how many copies of them were reported as sent out in the League's other records as compared with how many members were typically in attendance at their general meetings.

ideological affirmations, such as the forming of or participation on joint committees that attempt to, say, align the legislative programs of various labor or women's groups with one another. While this is similar to the direct action of cooperation, I see it as being one step removed, as it tends to focus on how the League attempted to get groups agreeing on what their future work ought to be rather than actually engaging together in that work. Finally, the chapter on sisterhood discusses how they talk about their actions and affiliations that point to the existence of sisterhood, encouraging them to act as if the experiences they see as unique to women already bind them together across class lines and reinforcing their version of feminism. This chapter necessarily draws on acts and affiliations that could easily be claimed by the first two categories, but giving them a separate chapter will allow me sufficient space to do justice to the League's work with the suffrage campaign and also with the controversy surrounding their support of protective legislation.

Of course, in talking about the methods League members use to ally themselves with certain groups or ideologies, I must also cover the ways in which they distance themselves from others. Returning again to Prelli, who claims that rhetorical displays are about "exhibiting the 'right' attitudes and feelings or proving the 'right' commitments and allegiances" (15), I would argue that forging group identities is equally about demonstrating that the group doesn't have the 'wrong' attitudes or feelings and doesn't associate with the 'wrong' commitments and allegiances. This is particularly true for a group like the League who is continually trying to win over partners who have strong biases against middle-class reformers or working-class revolutionaries. As we shall see, the League faced frequent demands, particularly from members of the labor movement, though also from those in the women's movement, that they prove not

only that they share values with them, but that they do not share values with some other group that does not meet with approval. Additionally, a thorough consideration demands that I examine those times when their attempts at using a rhetorical posture to establish friendly relations failed outright or was simply insufficient for surmounting the obstacles they faced, most notably in those instances where resignations or expulsions were their answer for how to maintain their group in the face of opposition.

What my project boils down to, then, is an exploration of some of the rhetorical means the New York League employed in order to create what Kenneth Burke has termed “identification.” As he describes it:

Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division.

Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man’s very essence. It would not be an ideal, as it now is, partly embodied in material conditions and partly frustrated by these same conditions; rather, it would be as natural, spontaneous, and total as with those ideal prototypes of communication, the theologian’s angels, or ‘messengers.’” (22)

In other words, the divisions that separate us from one another are real, at least in terms of their material consequences, and any attempt to overcome them to create connections among people will necessarily be tenuous, temporary, and limited in scope. The effectiveness of a group like the League will break down precisely at the moment when they are no longer able to create fictions of unity strong enough to overcome, at least momentarily, the inexorable pull of individual members’ disparate backgrounds, allegiances, ideologies, and, frankly, self-absorption. This

study explores the behind-the-scenes rhetorical practices of the League during the first decade and a half of its existence when its fictions of unity were strongest, as a feminism based on uniqueness from men was still persuasive and the pull towards organized labor had not yet been quieted by widespread anti-red campaigns.

As for my specific methods in the archive, I gained access to the records of the New York WTUL on microfilm through interlibrary loan, made digital copies of the materials that fell within the time frame I was most interested in (1903-1920) or within the topics I found most compelling even if they fell outside that timeframe (education committee scrapbook), reading and rereading them as I typed out pertinent passages to code according to the techniques I learned in the past while doing qualitative research. Qualitative data analysis methods struck me as highly appropriate since I am interested in the experiences and motivations of the women behind the words I'm looking at and also because J. Amos Hatch's description of such analysis as "organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (148) matches so well with what I hoped to accomplish. I initially approached my data with the expectation of seeing evidence of different rhetorical postures being struck for the different audiences I saw them interacting with the most (men within the labor movement, women within the group or who might join, workers of color or those speaking languages other than English whom they wished to help or organize, and political groups, especially women in the suffrage movement), but by employing an interpretive analysis approach as outlined by Hatch (181) I was able to maintain the flexibility called for by Heidi McKee and James Porter, with a "research process . . . marked by ethical revisionings and the need for researchers to be

recursive in their thinking actions, to be open to adjusting not only what they're doing but why and how they're doing it" (63). As a result, I ended up going back into my data again, reorganizing it from a focus on audience, to one highlighting the definitions of cooperation, solidarity, and sisterhood outlined above. I accomplished this organization using a procedure that most nearly resembles the constant comparison methods of grounded theory as outlined by Hatch, as I certainly "formulat[ed] potential explanations and search[ed] for potential patterns through close reading and rereading of data throughout the analysis process, and [used] constant comparison . . . to determine if these potential 'theories' [were] grounded in the data" (55), though my seven years of training in university literature and linguistics classes also contributed significantly to how I approached that close reading.

The next chapter provides the historical background that helps explain the League's emergence and significance, as well as a sketch of their major activities and impact during the timeframe I am examining. Following that will be the three body chapters presenting the data from the archive of the League that illustrate the rhetorical postures I am examining. In order to gain a better idea of how these postures changed over time, each of the body chapters are further divided into the three major time periods that Nancy Schrom Dye observed during her work with this archive: the early organization efforts from 1904-1909, the major garment trade strikes from 1909-1913, and the turn towards suffrage and legislation from 1913-1920. Again, these divisions are somewhat arbitrary as the League's rhetorical acumen flowed in and out of these categories with little regard for my desire to order them neatly, but using these divisions will help to anchor us throughout the study, giving us familiar landmarks to order our understanding of the relationships among these postures over time. The actual scope of my primary texts is slightly

smaller than Dye's selection, however, as I ultimately decided to limit my research to texts appearing between March 8, 1906 and September 8, 1919. My starting point is the first date on which the meeting minutes were typewritten rather than handwritten as I was simply not confident in my ability to decipher the earlier ones, and the end date is the first time that the League openly without apology backs a political candidate's campaign, a major shift in rhetorical tactic for them that seemed like a fitting end cap to my study.

Chapter 2: Historical Context

In the Fall of 1903, in a series of meetings in Boston with various union and settlement house leaders during the American Federation of Labor's annual convention, William English Walling, with the help of Mary Kenney O'Sullivan, established the Women's Trade Union League as a vehicle for organizing more women into trade unions. Walling, a twenty-six year-old resident of the University Settlement on New York's lower East Side, had recently returned from England where he observed the work of the British Women's Trade Union League (*As Sisters* 14). The British League had been established in 1874 and Walling was impressed by the cross-class make-up of its membership and attended the AFL convention in the hope of starting a similar organization in the United States (*As Sisters* 14). He had become committed to the labor movement as a result of his work as a factory inspector in Chicago as well as his contact with unionists at Hull House and then the University Settlement, and these experiences also made him aware of the special issues faced by women in the workplace (*As Sisters* 14). Walling hoped that a Women's Trade Union League would enable working women to define their own goals while receiving help that would not impose middle-class values or act as "an instrument for social control" (Foner 300). Despite being started by a man and allowing male members, the leadership and day-to-day work of the League was to be carried out by women.

When I first heard about the League while watching a documentary on the Triangle Shirt Waist factory fire, I was intrigued by the notion that this cross-class, woman-led organization would be an effective means of changing the lives of working class women, particularly as union organizing seemed like such an alien rhetorical activity for respectable women to engage in during a time when separate spheres ideology still placed so many limitations on them. As Nan

Johnson describes it, “what emerges in the postbellum period and the late-nineteenth century as a solution to what many nineteenth-century authors define as *the woman question* (the debate over women’s roles and rights) is the strategy of constraining the political power of women’s discourse by redirecting women to rhetorical roles in the home and complicating their access to the public rhetorical spaces where the fate of the nation was debated” (2). In light of these constraints, I wondered how this shift from more traditionally female causes to that of the seemingly masculine issue of labor had occurred? Additionally, why did Walling, a man who presumably would have had access to more public venues, believe that a woman’s club would be the best vehicle for change? Once they were established, how did such a diverse group, from such different financial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, manage to work together so well for so long?

As I mentioned in the last chapter, when I explored the League’s actual records, I discovered that the more pressing question for me was how they constructed themselves rhetorically as a group in order to achieve their goals, and I will devote the bulk of this dissertation to answering that, but I would like to begin by addressing the first two questions above. As I delved into the history of women’s voluntary associations as well as the primary goals of the social reformers more generally during the Progressive era, the emergence of the National WTUL in 1903 began to appear more as a natural, almost inevitable, culmination of the reform work of the previous century rather than as a departure from it. This is particularly true for the New York branch of the WTUL, whose records are my primary focus, as they moved more and more towards using legislation to affect change, a move that also occurred more generally in reform circles as we moved as a nation from an emphasis on local charities towards

the modern welfare state. To understand this progression from seemingly docile women participating in local benevolent voluntary associations firmly planted within separate spheres ideology to savvy women rhetoricians using the WTUL to influence state and national labor policy, it will be helpful to look first to the specific economic and social conditions under which it was formed and then to the examples of the League's predecessors, particularly among women's clubs. Finally, I will outline some of the major events and activities of the New York League during the period under examination.

Women in the Workforce

To begin with, despite many popular narratives to the contrary, American women have a long history of being in the workforce. By 1900, in fact, "5,319,397 women -- one in every five -- were in the labor force, and of 303 occupations listed in the 1900 Census, women were represented in 296 (Foner 257). Despite this seemingly widespread representation, however, there was a concentration of women within certain trades that often amounted to near segregation along gender lines. For instance, "the waist, children's dress, wrapper and kimono, and white goods industries were known as the 'women's trades.' From 85 to 95 percent of the workforce in these branches was female" (*As Sisters* 20). These women weren't working to purchase little luxuries but to support themselves and their families in a society that rarely furnished sufficient wages to support an individual, let alone an entire family unit on one income. In fact, "wages were low (in 1905, for example, they averaged \$5.25 per week), hours were long, and conditions were nearly intolerable" (Kenneally 66). In New York City in the early twentieth century, the typical female industrial worker was "a young, single, Jewish or Italian woman who lived at home with her family" (*As Sisters* 18). These girls would begin working in their mid-teens and

continue working until they married in their early twenties (*As Sisters* 18). One study reported that “87 percent of New York City’s female industrial workers lived with their parents. Of these, 88.1 percent gave their unopened pay envelopes to the head of their household” (*As Sisters* 18).

Despite their youth and subordinate position within their families, however, working women’s impact had long been felt in protests against the difficult conditions of the new industrial system. James J. Kenneally reports that “the first all-woman strike occurred in 1828, when between 300 and 400 workers walked out of a cotton mill in Dover, New Hampshire. During the next decade there were significant strikes by women in Lowell and Lynn, Massachusetts; New York City; Baltimore, Maryland; Paterson, New Jersey; and Norristown, Philadelphia, and Manayunk, Pennsylvania” (58). Despite these early efforts, however, male unionists tended to discount women workers and failed to organize them effectively. Nancy Schrom Dye points out that “no single factor explains why so few women were unionized in early twentieth-century New York City. Instead, the difficulties involved in integrating women into the city’s labor movement resulted from several interrelated factors involving ethnicity, skill levels, and sex roles” (“Creating” 25). While groups like the American Federation of Labor (AFL) passed resolutions in support of women workers, they rarely backed them with monetary or personnel resources (Payne 96, Foner 293).

Kenneally argues that this behavior arose because, “torn between the desire to protect themselves from unfair competition by encouraging equal treatment for women and their belief that ‘ladies’ belonged at home, American unions displayed an ambivalence that would last well into the twentieth century” (59). Philip S. Foner goes further, explaining that:

nearly all unions -- Socialist and non-Socialist alike -- were handicapped by the belief

that women's sojourn in the world of work was temporary; that their real goal was marriage and that they were too passive and too inarticulate to contribute a high degree of commitment to unionism. With these premises, these union leaders reasoned that it would be a waste of the union's time and money to attempt to organize them. (294)

While granting the validity of these ideologically based misreadings of women as motivators for the AFL's negligence of women workers, Elizabeth Anne Payne points out in her biography of Margaret Dreier Robins, president of the national WTUL from 1907-1922, that the AFL's commitment to organizing primarily skilled labor, a type of labor that women workers (as well as immigrants and workers of color) were rarely allowed to enter, was also a factor in their failure to fully attend to the needs of women workers (101). Add to this the women's own ambivalent perceptions of themselves as workers and the fact that most unions met in "pubs or social halls where women felt neither comfortable nor welcome" (Jacoby 5), and it is not so surprising that the typical practice of the labor movement of the time was that, "once organized, women would be incorporated into a union, but established unions would spend little time, effort, or money organizing them. If women were to be organized, they would have to do the job themselves" (*As Sisters* 32).

Industrial Revolution and the Emergence of the League

Granting that women were already present and active in the workforce and, while present in the labor movement, in need of a little help to increase that presence, what were the specific economic, social, and political upheavals that were occurring more generally during the decades surrounding the formation of the WTUL that help to explain its appearance at that moment in history? Robert H. Wiebe points to the dynamic changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution as

one of the major forces behind the proliferation of reform groups that would eventually lead to Progressive ones like the League. Early American values such as “modesty in women, rectitude in men, and thrift, sobriety, and hard work in both . . . derived from what they knew: the economics of a family budget, the returns that came to the industrious and the lazy, the obnoxious behavior of the drunken braggart, the advantages of a wife who stayed home and kept a good house” (4). However, as small, isolated, closely knit communities were increasingly replaced by growing cities and factory towns filled with new and temporary residents, these values were no longer sufficient for the smooth functioning of communal life, as they became increasingly at odds with newer virtues like regularity, system, and continuity (14). Wiebe points out that “as men ranged farther and farther from their communities, they tried desperately to understand the larger world through the customs of a personal society. They failed, usually without recognizing why; and that failure to comprehend a society they were helping to make contained the essence of the nation’s story” (12). In other words, the metaphors of a farm village couldn’t account for all of the complex interactions of an industrial, capitalist city, especially when its often transient residents failed to form the sorts of scrutinizing neighborly ties that had previously been so powerful in dictating behavior.

The situation was even more perplexing for those non-native sons, millions of whom Wiebe claims:

inhabited another world. ‘My people do not live in America,’ declared a Slavic immigrant, ‘they live underneath America.’ The same held true for many more who had recently arrived from Europe, for the gangs of Chinese who had laid the Central Pacific tracks, for Negroes a step from slavery, for the growing bands of migratory workers, and

for other marginals in industry and agriculture (9).

Without the bonds and charitable protections of a local community, or an understanding of the mainstream American ideal of what such a community ought to look like, these outsiders frequently faced uncertainty, extreme poverty, and deplorable living conditions. That is not to say that the groups on the margins didn't build their own communities, but rather that the lack of integration into the longer established, white, Protestant America's communal body contributed to breakdowns in the accomplishment of civic goals. For example, as city populations burgeoned in the 1880s, desperate needs for fundamental services like water, sewers, and transportation arose, but those increases simultaneously undermined the ability of local governments to meet such needs through the destruction of close ties between constituents and neighborhood leaders that might otherwise have encouraged social action (13). Instead, small groups of those in positions of power (read white Anglo-Saxon Protestant men) were often far more motivated by the desire to keep absentee big business interests happy through lower taxes than they were by the thought of the suffering of so many new immigrants or other outsiders, therefore, "essential services became the playthings of private profit, and a busy people paid the price of danger, dirt, and disease" (13).

In the same way, the move from community-based small businesses to national trusts and corporations led to a breakdown in the employer/employee relationship. While eighteenth and nineteenth century standards of business practice had embraced an, albeit paternalistic and condescending, ethic of care for ones employees, the sprawling nature of the factory meant that power effectively passed into the hands of foremen, who often ruled their little kingdoms as tyrants who could hire, fire, and frustrate as they pleased without regard for the christian duty of

fatherly care for employees (20-21). And even among the owners, the old values carried less weight as they became increasingly divided from personal interactions. Weibe describes how “inhibitions that restrained a man in his own community scarcely applied when his decisions involved distant, invisible people” (37), offering as an example the 1913 shooting at a strikers’ camp outside Ludlow, Colorado by local Colorado Coal and Iron Company agents, which was regarded by the kindly and philanthropic owner, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., not as something that resulted from the policies he had put in place for running his company, but as a shocking affair that he felt no more responsible for than he might for an unfortunate act of nature (38).

The specific impact of the emergence of industrial capitalism on women was quite profound. As Robin Miller Jacoby notes, among the processes that underwent the transformation of the industrialization of work were those “related to food and clothing, areas of production that had traditionally fallen within the sphere of women’s work. As a result, many working-class women simply moved their work from the home to the factory; many women of the upper classes, however, experienced the loss of an economically productive role” (3). As Dye also notes:

For the wives and daughters of manufacturers, businessmen, and the new middle class of salaried professionals, however, industrialization had very different effects. The industrial revolution spawned a value system that fostered female idleness and delicacy. Women, as Thorstein Veblen concluded in his economic analysis of American society, were important primarily as consumers. Their clothes, their furnishings, their households, and their leisure itself were tangible evidence of their husbands’ ability to make money.

Women, in short, were ornamental anomalies in a society that glorified productive work.

(As Sisters 9)

Expected to stay in the home, but without the productive labor of clothing production, food preservation, or laundry which now belonged to the industrial complex, these middle- and upper-class women often felt childlike and parasitical. Dye claims that “the woman movement arose in good part out of this restlessness and desire to feel socially useful. The most publicized demand of the movement was, of course, the vote. But political equality was only one issue that concerned women. What women demanded above all was the right to meaningful work. Sentenced to what they viewed as a life of parasitical and oppressive leisure, affluent women often looked with fascination, even envy, at women who worked for a living” *(As Sisters 9)*. As their work was outsourced to the factory, and in turn, to the working girl, middle- and upper-class women found themselves with time on their hands. Some of them chose to use that time to attempt to improve the lives of the women whose labor made their leisure possible.

Reform Movements

While people like Rockefeller and many others seemed to live in willful ignorance of slum life or to choose to see working class complaints as ingratitude or disloyalty (10, 20), others Wiebe says, saw opportunities to intervene and improve daily life for workers and their families. Early reform groups focused primarily on returning society to the values of farm and village life, fearing that newcomers who were not exposed to such “democratizing influences” could never learn the “American way” (65). Even in the case of a group like the Knights of Labor, which hoped to eventually replace the destructive force of capitalism with “producer and consumer

cooperatives,” this move was seen as “the economic expression of the community spirit” (67).

Indeed, Wiebe claims that:

the sweep of reform represented by these movements sought to preserve individualism and democracy, as their adherents understood the terms, by protecting America’s communities. In no sense did the reformers expect to realize their program by way of its antithesis; that is, by constructing a huge apparatus for centralized direction. . . . Each proposal attempted to place power in the hands of small, familiar groups under the dual assumptions that it had once resided there and that a good society required its return.

(74)

The trouble was, as mentioned before, the ills of a complex society stretched beyond the confines of the local. When distant, unseen powers controlled the price paid for farm commodities or the rate paid to factory workers or the cost of rent, strictly local interventions might temporarily alleviate distress, but they could do little to alter the root causes of that distress. Along the same lines, mistreatments and abuses of power that arose out of the prejudices of local authorities would likely only change if a more powerful body, such as the national government, pushed for reforms. American society refused to remain in the old community molds and a new group of reformers eventually emerged with new ideas about how to clean up the ugly underbelly of a capitalist democracy using alternate forms of communal action to do so.

Despite some sympathy for or even direct affiliation with more seemingly radical groups like the Socialist Party, these new reformers, known as Progressives, generally speaking, were looking not to overthrow capitalism or completely restructure society, but rather to “limit the socially self-destructive effects of morally unhindered capitalism, to extract from those markets

the tasks they had demonstrably bungled, to counterbalance the markets' atomizing social effects with a counter calculus of the public weal" (Rodgers 210), and they sought to do so particularly through legislation. Daniel T. Rodgers points out that the drive for these reforms didn't flow out of a newly abundant pool of social problems: the economy and social tensions were arguably no worse at the beginning of the twentieth century than they had been during the post-Civil War era. What had changed was the sudden abundance of solutions that seemed capable of addressing those issues that did exist as reformers learned to look beyond the American local community model to other, larger programs for reform (7). Interestingly, these reformers embraced new forms of community, such as the settlement house or voluntary association, with an eye towards how others in the global community were handling similar issues, in order to compensate for the social ills brought on by the loss of traditional community ties and to forge alliances strong enough to implement their solutions. Progressives were marked by their seemingly limitless optimism, which carried them "further and further into modern society's hitherto unexamined corners" (Wiebe 165) through a belief that if they could just find the right technique or method, no problem could possibly go unsolved (Wiebe 198).

Naturally, this optimism was not always realistic or well-placed. Wiebe describes them further by saying:

most progressives paid to human beings the high compliment of believing that, once they knew the truth, they would act upon it. Yet they were an impatient, sometimes arrogant lot who abided very few human failings. The delusive assumption that all good citizens shared their goals — or would as soon as they were explained — led them to trample sensibilities without regard for the resentment that was accumulating about them.

Millions did not care in the slightest about a city budget, or preferred their children at work instead of at school, or feared the black magic of modern medicine. (212-13)

Still, the vast changes they were able to implement seemed to justify at least some of their belief in society's imminent utopian reform (Wiebe 198). They valued expert opinions and seemed to have no qualms with maintaining an elite (174), which was unsurprising in "an age that assumed an automatic connection between accurate data and rational action" (181), but this faith in a few enlightened leaders at the front didn't change their belief that the plight of the common man ought to be improved. Though it did often color their vision of what those improved lives ought to look like.

Women's Clubs

Of course considering their widespread agenda, it is only natural that Progressives came in many different shapes and sizes with vastly different plans for the remaking of society. The branch of greatest interest to my purposes is that composed of those whom Rodgers referred to as "social maternalists" who always "began with the particular vulnerabilities of women, children, and families" (19) and which Wiebe referred to as "humanitarian progressivism," which took the child as its central theme inevitably leading to closer scrutiny of the needs of female wage earners, or "mothers in absentia" (169). While there were certainly many men involved in the various groups and voluntary associations that sprang up around this form of Progressivism, it seemed to be particularly appealing to those groups that were run exclusively by women. This appeal makes sense given the Victorian era notion of women as the guardians of the home and family. The more mainstream focus of social policy debate on social peace and economic justice (Rodgers 20) might very well appear to be an unladylike concern beyond the ken of women

before suffrage, but few could argue with a woman's right to intervene, at least to some extent, into issues like children's labor laws, women's working conditions, early education standards, and public health when they all had a clear bearing on the accepted sphere of women, family life. As Barbara Welter pointed out in her landmark essay describing separate spheres ideology, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," "the very perfection of True Womanhood, moreover, carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. For if woman was so very little less than the angels, she should surely take a more active part in running the world, especially since men were making such a hash of things" (174). In fact, Anne Firor Scott's survey of the history of American women's associations quickly reveals that it did not require the emergence of Progressivism for women to become involved in these areas. On the contrary, one could argue that Progressivism emerged at least in part as a result of more than a century's work toward social reform from earlier club women in their missionary societies and sewing circles.

Scott begins by observing that "since the early days of the Republic women have organized to achieve goals that seemed to them important. In retrospect it is clear that such women, constrained by law and custom, and denied access to most of the major institutions by which the society governed itself and created its culture, used voluntary associations to evade some of these constraints and to redefine 'woman's place' by giving it a public dimension" (2). Socialized to believe that they were more sensitive than men and could best relate to other women, prompting them to create most of their significant personal relationships with them, these women "banded together in female networks that provided mutual support, advice, assistance, and companionship" (*As Sisters* 12). Rather than viewing the woman's club, as Nan Johnson might, as another example of how society pushed women out of public view into the

parlor, Scott sees them as a place where women were able to press the boundaries of their roles, using incorporation to reduce their legal limitations to act. In fact, through their associations, white women's clubs at least were able to do "things otherwise forbidden to married women such as acquiring, holding, and conveying property" long before legislation was passed to allow them such privileges as individuals (26). She points out that many such groups also had a political dimension from as early as the 1790s when they sought charters, and later funding, from state legislatures, yet they rarely roused public uproar because as a means of benevolence, they "tended to fulfill the basic cultural expectation that women should be compassionate and nurturing [providing] women with a public way to practice these virtues without calling their fundamental womanliness into question in any way" (25-26).

The trouble was that once women started looking at poverty in order to pass out shoes or clothing or food, it was difficult for them to avoid considering, and trying to alleviate, the underlying causes of poverty as they understood them. Efforts at simple charity often gave way to attempts at community institutions like schools, orphanages, employment services, retirement homes, and places for juvenile delinquents (Scott 25). While the progression wasn't unilateral, with many groups seeming to bounce back and forth among religious, social, and cultural activities (Scott 140), a pattern was certainly discernible. Even with elite groups like Boston's Fragment Society, which specialized in charitable activities like making and passing out baby layettes to widowed and unwed mothers, efforts to meet the needs of single women led to concerns about low wages for women as early as 1834, though they were unable to effectively address those concerns at that time (30-31). By 1899, more than 400 women's clubs were trying to improve the "social and political economy" in these ways (Kenneally 66). Unfortunately, as

with the Progressive reformers mentioned above, the philanthropic bent of these initiatives often alienated or failed to understand the needs of working women, with some short-lived activities being scorned publicly as “nothing more than titillation for bored women with nothing else to do” (Foner 291).² While the communities these women created for themselves may have provided them with friendship and fellowship, the homogenous nature of their memberships limited the scope of their effective outreach.

Nevertheless, despite such criticism, Scott finds further evidence for the boundary-testing element of women’s clubs in the propensity of women to form them in spite of the existence of male-dominated groups who welcomed their participation. She claims that women who joined these groups “soon found that they were expected to work but not to have opinions. It was not long before they began to organize all-female societies in which they could speak their minds” (44). In doing so, they reinforced the “dominant strains of feminist thinking [that] . . . encompassed two somewhat contradictory premises. First, women should have the same political, legal, educational, and economic rights as men; second, owing to women’s reproductive and maternal roles, they were physically, psychologically, and intellectually different from men in certain fundamental ways” (Jacoby 8-9). Underlying these premises were two assumptions — “that all women were oppressed and that all women were potential or actual mothers — creat[ing] a bond of sisterhood among all women that theoretically transcended class, racial, and national differences” (Jacoby 8-9). This sisterhood, so they believed, would, at least intermittently, enable them to be better advocates for one another than the more clearly political

² This criticism seems particularly pernicious considering the many accomplishments of women’s associations Scott details throughout her work from the implementation of new water filtration systems (by Philadelphia’s New Century Club in 1893) to countless schools, libraries, orphanages, hospitals, and employment agencies, not to mention the passage of important early labor legislation.

endeavors of male-dominated groups. Even granting the limitations of women's associations to fully comprehend the needs and desires of working women, who didn't necessarily seek for themselves the same vision of middle-class utopia as the reformers did, this trope of sisterhood led to many changes. As Scott so beautifully puts it:

When the WCTU moved rapidly from the destruction of saloons to the building of institutions for women and children, when the missionary societies, observing the consequences of poverty for the home life they considered essential to the next generation, began to turn from the study of the Bible to the study of their own communities, as wage-earning women experimented with all-woman unions, as one middle-class group after another turned to the needs of 'our working sisters,' they were all laying the foundation, creating the state of mind, which would characterize much of women's organized effort in the four decades after 1890. (176)

The League Emerges

And so Walling decided to establish the Women's Trade Union League in 1903 to make use of the dynamic force of a women's association to address the needs of the women who were persisting in the work force and continuing to face the same wage and hour issues that motivated male workers to organize in addition to further difficulties brought on by popular perceptions of their gender limitations. In the absence of mainstream union backing, he hoped this cross-class body that could recruit both women of means and education, to provide funds and socio-political know-how, and working women, to provide direction and insider knowledge would implement changes that previous labor or reform efforts had failed to bring about.

There were, of course, some differences between the League and its predecessors. Nancy Schrom Dye sees two main ones that helped the League to become the effective tool that it was for the first half of the twentieth century. First, the League sought to actually organize women into unions whereas other groups tended to focus on things like social investigations, which drew attention to problems in the workplace but didn't necessarily do anything to address them ("Article" look it up 25). While this connection to the wider labor movement was often strained as we shall see, it did provide an additional source of potential power for working women to draw on that many previous groups did not. Secondly, the League continually stressed the importance of cross-class alliances, with membership "open to any individual who professed her allegiance to the American Federation of Labor and who indicated her willingness to work to unionize" (25). In an attempt to prevent a slippage into middle-class women taking over, they even went so far as to require that working women must always hold the majority of seats on the Executive Board with non-union members of the League, dubbed "allies," making up the rest (Foner 300). Granted, over the course of the time period I am examining, Dye notes a transformation of the League from "a self-defined labor organization that downplayed women's special concerns in the workforce into a women's reform organization that emphasized specifically female demands, namely, woman suffrage and protective legislation" (1), but the path they followed toward this end still differed from other reform groups, and their emphasis on cross-class alliances remained firm throughout.

The initial goal of the League seemed fairly clear: to educate working women to the importance of unionization and to educate union men to change their negative attitudes toward working women (Foner 303). In order to do so, however, the League had to forge working

alliances among a wide variety of groups who might not immediately see the common ground they shared in their desires for workplace reform. On the one hand, League founders wished to recruit allies from the upper classes, and these women brought with them a rather eclectic agenda from their previous experiences in Progressive reform activities, though Dye noted that most of them shared a common progression through philanthropic work that in many ways mirrored in individuals the progression noted above in women's volunteer associations:

Genteel charity work such as friendly visiting usually provided their initial experience in social service . . . It exposed intelligent, sheltered, upper-class women to living and working conditions they could never have seen otherwise, and it fostered the beginnings of their discontent with American society. . . . Once a woman became disenchanted with traditional welfare work, she often turned to a settlement house. Because settlements frequently sponsored industrial investigations, allies were often knowledgeable about working conditions. But settlements offered no solutions to the problems that confronted the urban poor. (41)

The League was the natural next step for these women, as it offered concrete actions that could lead to change, but they still came to it with varying allegiances. Among the early recruits to the League were prominent settlement house residents, members of the Women's Committee of the New York Socialist party, social investigators, and suffragists (including Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch) (*As Sisters* 38-39).

In practice, then, the early League was heavily influenced by allies invested in the admittedly eclectic reform movement and seemed to struggle a bit to stay focused on their

agenda to educate working women on the value of organization and get them incorporated into the wider labor movement. As Dye explains,

The [League] began its work in a difficult time and place. It would have to devise ways to reach and organize young women who were unskilled, poorly paid, and temporary. Its members would have to learn to communicate with immigrants who spoke no English and who knew little about American industrial society. Finally, its members would have to find ways to adapt union structures created for skilled men to unskilled women and to convince indifferent or hostile trade unionists to organize and accept women as their sisters and their equals. (32-33)

At their first national convention in 1907, the League adopted a six-point platform of equal pay for equal work; full citizenship for women; the organization of all workers into trade unions; the eight hour work day; a minimum wage scale; and all the principles embodied in the economic program of the AFL (Foner 304), which already shows their divided allegiances to the women's movement, Progressive reform, and trade unionism. Add to this mix that many allies still felt that industrial investigations and education ought to be the League's primary goals, and the uphill battle that League members had to fight in order to establish some sense of group identity and purpose in order to accomplish anything becomes quite clear. One could argue that these were all worthy endeavors, but limited funding (trade unions never contributed significantly to the League, so they were forced to rely on wealthy donors) made prioritization a must (Foner 304). This tension between what they would ideally like to do and be and what their finances would actually allow plays out quite clearly in their records, as I will explore through the examples in the next chapter.

In addition to the allies, of course, the founders of the League also needed to recruit women unionists to serve on the Executive Board and be active on other committees and in the work of the League in general. Leonora O'Reilly was one of the first working-class women whom Walling asked to join the fledgling organization, and who would become one of its founding and most influential members, but as a thirty-three year-old resident of Asacog House, a Brooklyn settlement, with experience both with unions and various women's and working girls' clubs, she had in many ways already transcended some of the class boundaries that were rooted in her early years as a poor, Irish factory girl (*As Sisters* 34-35). More typical of the early recruits who became active members were Rose Schneiderman and Melinda Scott, both of whom served as League President. They were typical and held the same office, but they represented two very different working perspectives — Schneiderman joined the League in 1905 as a twenty-three year-old cap maker emerging from “the turbulent world of early twentieth-century Jewish radicalism” while Scott joined in 1907 as a highly skilled hat trimmer “from a conservative craft-union tradition” (*As Sisters* 48, 50). Both joined the League after the League helped them during a union strike (*As Sisters* 50-51), and both worked as organizers for the League, but they had decidedly different approaches to strikes and organization that played out in overall League policy over the course of the period I am examining.

Dye describes the early years of the League as follows:

In its organizing work from late 1904 until the shirtwaist strike late in 1909, the WTUL played a unique role in the unionization of the city's women workers. It attempted to serve as a link between women wage earners and the labor movement and as a center for unorganized women interested in unionism. It sought to channel women into stable

unions and to integrate them into the established labor movement. To these ends, the WTUL agitated among unorganized Jewish, Italian, and native-born women in an effort to educate them in the combined principles of feminism and unionism. The executive board aided local unions' strikes and made concerted efforts to change male unionists' negative attitudes toward women" (*As Sisters* 61).

The League styled themselves as a central body of women, organizing all-woman unions among the needle trades, tobacco industry, paper-box makers, candy workers, retail clerks, waitresses, laundresses, and others (*As Sisters* 61). This gender segregation grew out of the craft-based unionism that the League espoused in that the trades, as mentioned earlier, tended to be divided along gender lines, despite the fact that the League favored integration. They vehemently opposed that sort of integration that consisted solely in male unionists showing up (on occasion, when convenient for them) to direct the course of women's unions' affairs, but were in favor of women taking on leadership roles and having a voice within union locals and central bodies.

During these early years, the League had to teach itself how to go about organizing women into trade unions, approaching "their work with only one certainty: they should follow the guidelines set down by the American Federation of Labor. Organization should be conducted on a shop-by-shop basis, strict jurisdictional boundaries should be observed, and 'bread-and-butter' issues should be the basis of union demands . . . From the start, the New York league assumed a subordinate stance and stressed that its role was to assist trade union officials in organizing women" (*As Sisters* 63). Of course, following AFL protocols didn't help League members in identifying which women were most likely to respond to attempts to organize them, so the League spent its first few years in haphazard endeavors to interest women, either because

a particular League member wanted to approach that group or because the League's investigations had revealed that trade to be one of the most exploited. Dye points out, however, that "by early 1906, after more than a year of discouraging work with paper-box makers and laundresses and short-lived attempts to unionized waitresses and retail-clerks, the executive board decided that oppression was not a sufficient basis for unionization, a realization that Robin Miller Jacoby noted as a reason that the League "advocated protective legislation as a necessary underpinning to the unionization of women workers, since it . . . recognized that their long hours, low wages, and miserable working conditions impeded their entry into the labor movement" (119). Henceforth, organizing should follow the path of least resistance" (*As Sisters* 65). This new policy led the League to begin organizing extensively in the needle trades of the East Side.

By the time of the great shirtwaist makers' strike of 1909, or more accurately, through it, the League became a force to be reckoned with within the labor movement. Beginning in the summer of 1909, women workers sought the League's help with disputes with three large waist companies. Early successes led more women to join the waistmakers' union, Local 25, and engage in further strikes, including one at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company (*As Sisters* 89). Dye notes that "the strike cut across occupational lines. In an extraordinary display of unity, cutters, pressers, operators, and finishers walked out together. Even some subcontractors took part" (*As Sisters* 89). All of this unrest led up to the general strike involving more than twenty thousand waistmakers that began on November 24, 1909 (*As Sisters* 88), becoming the first major women's strike in the United States and also gaining notoriety for its unique ability to capture "the sympathy and support of women from every class background" (*As Sisters* 91), a claim it

owes in large part to the aid and publicity it gained through the efforts of the League. Again, in Dye's words, "despite the strike's less than satisfactory end," (while many of the smaller shops won improved conditions and better wages, the largest shops never settled and they didn't manage to gain a closed shop) "it was the New York league's finest hour. It was spectacular proof that women were capable of expressing discontent forcefully and collectively. What was more, women could organize as well as strike. The waistmakers' union was the largest ILGWU local, with nearly twenty thousand members, 80 percent of whom were women" (*As Sisters* 94).

Despite this exhilarating success, the League was soon disillusioned by the labor movement and tactics of unions on the East Side. Their relationship with the ILGWU rapidly deteriorated as they saw how quickly the gains of the shirtwaist strike were lost in 1910 due to the weakness of the international and the shop-by-shop system of agreements (*As Sisters* 96), and then tragedy struck the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, one of the large ones that had not settled with Local 25, in March of 1911. Believed to have been started by a cigarette dropped into a remnant drawer, a fire raged through the overcrowded loft building that afternoon. Some managed to escape across the roof of the building, while others made it down the narrow stairs or into the elevator before they were cut off by flames, but many were trapped behind doors locked from the outside, and chose to throw themselves from the ninth and tenth story windows rather than be burned alive. Still more remained behind. All told, 146 Triangle workers were killed (*As Sisters* 96). As Dye argues, "the Triangle fire demoralized the New York league, for the tragedy dramatized how little progress had been made in improving working women's conditions" (*As Sisters* 96). Indeed, as we shall see in the next three chapters, their horror over the tragedy was only intensified by the fact that they had already begun agitating for increased fire safety

following a deadly fire in Newark, New Jersey just a few months prior, yet had been unable to save these women and girls, many of whom they knew personally.

That spring, the waistmakers' union began agitating for another general strike, but this time the League was opposed to the measure because they had lost faith in the tactic and at least some League members thought the leadership of Local 25 was incompetent, most notably Secretary Helen Marot (*As Sisters* 97). Marot, who came from a well-to-do Quaker family and became a socialist and social investigator before joining the League (*As Sisters* 39-40), did not approve of the disorderly and unbusinesslike methods of the radical socialists who were leading Local 25 (*As Sisters* 97), and, "what was more, the Russian Jewish socialists who managed Local 25 and other ILGWU locals in the women's trades thought little of the women's ability to participate in union activities — a fact that angered WTUL women . . . Over 80 percent of the waistmakers' rank and file was female, but men were the unchallenged leaders. No women held positions of power within the union hierarchy" (*As Sisters* 97). As Dye points out, "the general strike tactic reinforced and perpetuated women's inferiority, for although women were in the forefront, they had no opportunity to learn about organizing or managing a union" (*As Sisters* 98). When Marot publicly criticized the leaders of Local 25 in the *Jewish Daily Forward* (or *Vorwartz*), backing instead the conservative wing of the union's leadership for an upcoming election, the rift between the League and the waistmakers' union widened, even though the Executive Board censured her actions (*As Sisters* 98).

When Local 25 called a second strike in October of 1911, the League didn't endorse it and only gave limited assistance. Similarly, during that same time period, the white-goods union asked the League to support them in a general strike, but the League refused, despite Rose

Schneiderman's belief that such a strike would be the only way to organize the trade en masse, supporting instead a shop-by-shop drive that would give women the opportunity to be instructed in trade-union principles and to participate in union affairs (*As Sisters* 99). When a general strike was called anyway in 1912, the League participated reluctantly, giving far less financially, and complaining far more vociferously about union leadership and interference with their efforts (100). When the League did offer enthusiastic support to a Laundry workers' strike in early 1912, it ended in unmitigated defeat (*As Sisters* 101). On top of all this, the League also began losing faith in the AFL and its methods during this time, realizing that "their organization's identification with the federation saddled them with methods and an ideology that were inappropriate for unskilled immigrant women" (*As Sisters* 102). This assessment of the AFL was fueled in part by the fact that they never could win over key leaders to their cause, with some like Samuel Gompers believing that the League was composed of socialists and philanthropic dilettantes (*As Sisters* 102), and also by the fact that they were never allowed to be full-fledged members of the AFL, attending conventions as fraternal delegates who might be allowed a short speech, but were not allowed to vote (Jacoby 75), but their prime frustration arose from the AFL's insistence on favoring the rights and desires of skilled laborers over unskilled, as clearly evidenced by their botched settlements of strikes in both Chicago and Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1910 and 1912, respectively, in which strikes were declared over and settlements made with employers without consulting the workers themselves (*As Sisters* 103-105). Dye goes on to point out, however, that "despite their increasing disillusionment with the possibility of changing the labor movement's attitudes and policies toward women, WTUL members still did not formulate alternatives to the existing AFL structure. They did not seriously entertain ideas about breaking

away from the AFL and creating new types of unions for women. WTUL leaders continued to reject the alternative of independent women's unions for the same realistic reasons they had earlier: such segregated organizations could not maintain an adequate economic base" (*As Sisters* 107). Unable to imagine viable alternatives to the organization methods used by the AFL, League members instead began to lose faith in organization altogether, bringing us to the last phase in their development that I will be examining.

The first event of note during this time was the League's presidential election in 1914 following Mary Dreier's resignation from the post. All of the class and ethnic tensions inherent in the League's make-up came to a head in the contest between Melinda Scott and Rose Schneiderman. As Dye points out, "although both were workers, support for the two candidates divided along class and ethnic lines: allies backed Scott, while working women, particularly the younger Jewish immigrants who had joined the league during the general strikes, voted for Schneiderman" (*As Sisters* 117). Scott won the election, Schneiderman would temporarily leave the League, and the policies and involvements of the League changed as a result. These changes were characterized primarily by a growing commitment to protective legislation and women's suffrage. Ironically, these were both issues that Schneiderman strongly supported, and would become even more strongly pursued by the League once she became president after Scott's resignation in 1917 (*As Sisters* 120, 123). Another indication of the League's increasing shift from class to feminist concerns was the resignation of Helen Marot as Secretary in 1913 due to her dissatisfaction with the new emphasis of the League and the election of Maud O'Farrell Swartz as Secretary in 1916. While Swartz was a worker, she came to the League through suffrage rather than trade union work. Dye notes that, "under Marot, the secretary's office had

been the center for the league's organizing efforts. Swartz, however, was more concerned with coordinating legislative and suffrage work. A politically astute and effective lobbyist, she spent much time in Albany working to convince reluctant legislators of the importance of women's protective legislation" (*As Sisters* 128-29).

This shift was not the result of upper-class domination. In fact, Dye documents that "the numbers and influence of working women had increased dramatically over the years. By 1914, every WTUL officer was a worker: Melinda Scott was president, Schneiderman and a young unionist from the bookbinders vice-presidents. Eight out of the eleven executive board members were working women. The total membership of nearly five hundred women was evenly balanced between workers and allies" (*As Sisters* 118). It was evidence of a shift in the League's thinking in regard to working women. Previously, they tended to believe that women workers were oppressed mainly because they were workers. Now they were more convinced that it was because they were women. As a result of this shift, the League worked tirelessly for the suffrage campaign leading up to New York's 1915 referendum on the issue, which was soundly defeated, and again before the 1917 referendum, which passed, giving the women of New York the right to vote before the national amendment was passed in 1920 (*As Sisters* 137-38). In addition to suffrage, the League worked for legislation on maximum hours for women, workers compensation, factory safety, and, during World War I, for the protection and extension of labor laws that everyone else seemed willing to suspend (*As Sisters* 149). By 1917, most allies and working-class members who opposed such efforts had left the League, so such pursuits were, by the end of the war, no longer contentious or debated but seen as the primary work of the League with organization seen as only a secondary effort (*As Sisters* 150).

Ultimately, the League emerged at a time when women workers neglected by mainstream unions were in desperate need of an advocate and when women's associations were seen as an effective (and appropriate) means of addressing the needs of women. What makes them fascinating from a rhetorician's point of view is the complex rhetorical posturing they had to engage in both as a group and as individuals in order to draw women into their ranks, persuade men in labor and in government to support their goals, convince other women's clubs and coalitions of the appropriateness of their cause, and generally keep the peace among so many diverse groups. Schneiderman argued that "a *women's* trade union league was needed . . . because women workers responded to different arguments³ than did men workers. The League could focus on the particular concerns of women, such as the double shift -- having to perform household chores after coming home from long days in the factory" (Orleck 45), but they also benefitted from a century's worth of models who had turned the private expectations of the cult of true womanhood and the interpersonal relationships of the local women's association into a public platform for social change and political influence. League members were by no means without their shortcomings, but they do provide a glimpse into how ethnically diverse, cross-class coalitions can occasionally, if only temporarily, come together through rhetorical imaginings of unity to bring about positive, widespread changes in the lives of those involved. Over the next three chapters, I will examine places in the League's records that illustrate how they used these texts to help them in that rhetorical pursuit of coalition, reinforcing to their members their prowess with cooperation, solidarity, and sisterhood.

³ Orleck gives an example of male union flyers that demanded blood and violence as the sort of propaganda that generally did not persuade women to join unions, though it apparently worked for men.

Chapter 3: Cooperation

As I began to notice the emphasis that League records placed on the many coalitions that the group was attempting to establish within their ranks and with outsiders, it also became clear that the word “co-operate” was used over and over again to describe the activities associated with these connections. The idea that they were working together toward some purpose does seem fitting. Of course, within the labor movement, one would expect to find constant references to collective action, as that is the whole point in forming a union, finding greater strength to face more powerful elites by working together rather than as individuals, but “cooperation” struck me as a particularly appropriate description of a group like the League that straddles several different movements at once. After all, cooperation implies working alongside of someone or something that remains separate. One may cooperate with the police during an investigation, but doing so certainly does not make one a police officer, just as the League could cooperate with unions, suffrage associations, or political groups without necessarily becoming one of them or being incorporated into them. Similarly, cooperation is not a permanent partnership, as one can cease to be cooperative at any time, either because the purpose that motivated the cooperation has been achieved or because the persons involved no longer share the same purpose, or, more specific to our case, are no longer prioritizing the same purpose. Over the course of the three segments of time this study covers, the order of importance that the League gave to its primary goals changed, which in turn changed the nature and make-up of their cooperations.

As I worked at selecting examples of coalition-building rhetorical practices in the League’s records surrounding their many acts of cooperation, I discovered that they could be further divided into groups based on whether they were used to demonstrate the League’s status

as a worthy partner, their generous yet principled financial partnerships, or their unifying political or legislative efforts. In this chapter, I will trace out the changes in these over time, both in the actual activities the League engaged in and the ways those activities were discussed in their records, taking into account the fluctuations in membership and leadership that contributed to the differing visions of what they ought to be doing and how. While maintaining the “right” set of beliefs certainly plays into being a worthy partner, such intangibles will be covered under solidarity, as will be many small financial contributions that were more about affirming a relationship than undertaking a major project together. Additionally, their work for suffrage and some protective legislation will be presented under sisterhood. The goal here is to show how they were using what they were doing to build up their members’ sense of unity with one another and with the women and organizations with whom they engaged.

Early Organization Efforts: 1906-1909

Worthy Partners

This first category covers a rather wide array of activities, but they share a common theme in that they show the League making their best efforts to work well with others, in keeping with the dictates of the trade union principles espoused by the American Federation of Labor. Given the limits of my research to just the internal documents of the League, I will not speak to whether or not these methods were effective in convincing outside groups to work with the League or to see them in a similarly positive light, but they do paint a fairly clear picture of how the League hoped they would be viewed as a partner for the cause and the internal image they were attempting to create, and have active and/or contributing members buy into. Overall, this image involves listening to and being responsive to the needs of working women, anticipating

some of those needs so as to meet them preemptively, being ready and able to teach the basics of trade unionism even as they meet the newly organized without judgment, and having both the skills and the social networks necessary to act as competent liaisons among workers, the labor movement, and the wider public. The following examples don't all contain all of these elements, but most contain at least two or three of them.

To begin, we find on October 25, 1906, that "it was voted that Mr. Martin be requested to act as the League's representative when the Unions requested the League to act as intermediary between them and their employers at times of strike unless there was a trade committee to which such requests would be referred" (Reel 1 0124). Here we see the League planning ahead so that they already have a designated person to intercede for unions seeking their help, so long as doing so won't violate the norms established by other trade unionists, but within that plan, they make clear that this is what they will do "when requested." Similarly, on April 24, 1907, we see the following description of events:

The League was visited twice by a committee from the White Goods Workers and both times went with the committee to confer with the employer. The demands of the workers was (*sic*) that the shop should be a union shop. This seemed premature as the union was so young, however we tried for it, but in our first conference it was evident that it would not be granted but very probably half of them could go back as unionists. We understood at the league that the union agreed to this but in our second conference it developed that they would not go back unless all were taken. Miss Patterson and I attended a meeting of the union and reported our conference with the employer and we both advised their

affiliation with the A.F.of L. so that they could have the use of the Label. (Reel 1 0183-0184)

In this case, we have the League responding directly to a request for their assistance, and, despite their reservations about the likelihood of success, they try for the outcome that the union desires, showing that laying aside their own preferences makes them better partners. In addition, they point the union towards affiliation with the American Federation of Labor and one of their approved methods of negotiation with employers, the Union Label, which in theory could only be applied to products manufactured under union conditions, which again affirms their deference for the practices and dictates of the established labor movement.

Similarly, on October 24, 1907, the Secretary reports that “a representative of the Bonaz Embroidery Workers called at the office requesting us to help them organize. They had already had one meeting, but as they knew nothing about the business of conducting a meeting they would like to have us present” (Reel 1 0253). The League sent two representatives to them, with the secretary “speaking especially to the girls” (Reel 1 0253), instructing them in parliamentary procedure and the basic tenets of trade unionism, as they understood them. In the annual report for 1907-1908, we get a fuller description of their interaction with a group of cop winders from Newark, New Jersey:

During June, 1907, the League was called on to help in the strike of the cop winding girls of Clark’s Thread Mills of Newark. The cop winders were not organized, so there was little hope from the start that the strike could be won, but it seemed to be a possible time to start organization of the workers. . . There were 65 girls in the cop winding department, all of whom struck. It was after the strike had been on about a week or ten

days that the League was appealed to. Every effort was made to bring pressure to bear not only on the superintendent but on Mr. Clark. . . They were all unyielding and showed a splendid spirit of fraternity, but this could not hold against the fact that they had no organization and no backing, while the employer had both, as well as an unlimited number of workers to call upon. Not a girl went back to work; they are scattered, and as a group are lost to organized labor unless their failure has helped to teach the necessity for organizing before rather than after a strike. (Reel 22 0007-0008)

This is an interesting case because, on the one hand, the focus seems to be more on the worthiness of the cop winders as partners than on the League, which is perhaps unsurprising as the audience for the annual reports included more allies than were present at meetings who might yet need convincing to part with more of their surplus income, but also because they transform the failure of this particular strike into an opportunity to reinforce the need for the type of organization in which the League is offering instruction. Essentially, they are saying that if only they had been called in sooner, they could have helped these women to establish a permanent organization that could have withstood the power of their employer.

The following year in the annual report, we again see this sort of reinforcement of the League's AFL-style methods of organization in regard to the White Goods Workers when we read that:

The White Goods Workers' Union represents one of the most difficult branches of industry for organized effort. The girls are usually young girls of all nationalities. The former union of White Goods Workers was not organized on a solid trade union basis. It was not until August last year that the league was able to induce these workers to adopt

effective methods for organization. After six months of constant supervision and personal as well as group instruction the union has reached the point where it is ready of itself to become part of the national organization. It is hoped that the affiliation of this union will make possible the purchase of union label underwear. (Reel 22 0026-0027)

Again, while their specific methods are not outlined, we do get a picture of a devoted helper endeavoring, against all odds, to bring this eclectic group into the AFL fold, with the only personal gain being, perhaps, the acquisition of fairly-made undergarments. This also highlights one of their typical endeavors to show their loyalty to labor at this point in their history: getting local unions incorporated into their national organizations, a seemingly straightforward endeavor that rarely turned out to be so.

To illustrate, in her report for August 22, 1907, Secretary Helen Marot details the League's efforts to get a group of women working in the "coat shops," who were then striking with their organized male co-workers, organized into Local 102 of the United Garment Workers. The trouble was that technically, the Brotherhood of Tailors had jurisdiction over their trade, but "had stated, it was impossible for them to include these women at the present time in their local unions, and as they had stated, it was their intention to include them as soon as they were reorganized" (Reel 1 0231). The League therefore suggested that Local 102, who was prepared to organize the women, "take advantage of the present strike, and the signed agreements of the contractors with the Brotherhood to include the women in the organization agreement of the shops, and organize these women into Local 102; and when the Brotherhood was in a position to handle them, that they would recommend and urge all the girls to transfer their membership" (Reel 1 0231). The League, knowing of the strained relations between the

Brotherhood and the UGW saw this as “a conciliatory as well as an expedient move” (Reel 1 0231), but all of their efforts to bring the two groups together and get these women incorporated into the larger labor movement led to a “stormy” meeting that “ended in the members of the Brotherhood’s committee confessing that organization of the women would hurt the men; and in spite of their former protestations, that they expected to include them ‘when they were strong’ in their union, they all denounced their organization, when the discussion became heated” (Reel 1 0232). Immediately following on the heels of this apparent failure, however, is an upbeat account of the promising work that Marot has undertaken training the UGW organizer, Miss Finkelstein, whom she describes as handling “her work with wonderful discretion, and has in her the promise of stronger work in the future. She is conscientious and earnest” (Reel 1 0232), and then of their discovery through attending the meetings of Local 102 that a non-union shop was sewing union labels into their coats, which they reported and were about to have stopped (Reel 1 0232). This shows them transforming a potentially discouraging occurrence into a more promising indication of future success through continued cooperation with members of the UGW and the workers in that trade.

That October, the meeting minutes further record that “a motion was carried that the secretary be instructed to send a letter to the President of the American Federation of Labor stating that the question of jurisdiction between the International Shirt Waist & Laundry Workers Union and the United Garment Workers of America was holding up organization and that the League urge the matter be settled if possible at the National Convention” (Reel 1 0246). This demonstrates that, regardless of setbacks, they saw themselves as peacemakers, whose aim was to bring increased cooperation into the labor movement so that more women might be organized

and the working conditions of all wage earners materially improved. As they stated in their 1907-1908 annual report, “The strength of the League lies in its capacity to train wage-earning women for the work of organization, so that they may bear their fair share with the men in the effort to raise the standard of living for wage earners” (Reel 22 0004), and this played out in actions like holding conferences “at the League to help the national organization of hatters and the Newark local of hat trimmers in their efforts to organize the New York trimmers,” (Reel 22 0006) or “between the Hebrew bookbinders and the local organizations in New York of the International Brotherhood of Bookbinders. Negotiations begun at that conference are still continuing between the two unions” (Reel 22 0006). Similarly, they reported that “the League has been in conference throughout the winter with the Progressive Rolled Cigarette Makers, with the end in view of bringing the progressive Rolled Cigarette Makers under the jurisdiction of the National Cigar Makers’ Union” (Reel 22 0007). In all of these examples, we see the League placing themselves as the nexus among various groups, drawing them closer together, providing space for common ground to be developed. It also highlights their preference for class solidarity over feminist concerns in this period.

In much the same way, the League during this time began offering English classes in order to bring various groups into communication with one another. While these classes were too small to have made much of a dent in the actual language barriers that divided New York’s working women from one another, the amount of space devoted to them in the record indicates that they were nevertheless useful in creating an image of the League as a worthy cooperative partner. To illustrate, the minutes record on January 23, 1908 that “Miss Dreier’s action in appointing an Educational committee for the purpose of giving English lessons, and at the same

time trade union Lessons to foreign speaking girls was endorsed” (Reel 1 0293), and then we are updated on them June 1, 1908, saying “the English classes for the East Side girls have been recommenced and are being carried on now very successfully by Miss Ray Samuels and Miss May Schwartzman, members of the league. As they are public school teachers the classes are carried on in no amateurish way, which insures their success. Both the teachers are very enthusiastic” (Reel 1 0335). Clearly, the League wants the record to show that they are not only offering exceptional instruction, but that they are doing it with admirable, trade union motives. Even in reporting difficulties they ran into later that year, they attribute them to the eagerness of the workers to get the most out of what the League can offer them: “The English classes have started with some twelve to twenty-five pupils and three teachers. The teachers can give only one night a week and the class wishes to divide each evening so another teacher is necessary. They started in with interest and enthusiasm and it looks as though we would have a very much larger class than we are able to manage” (Reel 1 0374).

The area in which they portray themselves as being most in demand, however, is in speaking engagements. For example, when in August of 1907, the League takes “an active interest in the strike of the Com. Telegraphers” they receive two delegations of strikers asking Marot “to speak at their meeting at noon and to secure other speakers.” She stated that she “felt that the occasion required a speaker of force and so tried to get Mrs. Blatch [daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton] and Miss Wald in my place (they wanted women),” but “could get neither so went to the meeting of 500 or more, and assured them of the sympathy and interest of the League” (Reel 1 0233). Later in her report, Marot claims she “also wrote, at their request, to Mrs. Stokes, asking her to speak at one of their meetings, which she has consented to do. I think

I can say that we have established a friendly relation with the Com. Telegraphers” (Reel 1 0234). While this account is somewhat self-deprecating from Marot, it is far more typical for the record to simply list off the many varied venues in which members had spoken over the course of a month, such as when we read in January of 1909 that “Miss O’Reilly reported that she had spoken in Northampton for the Home Culture Club, Smith College girls. She spoke also at Boston, and at a meeting at Mrs. Kehew’s house; a meeting of the Boston Hat Trimmers and the 20th Century Club. She also had spoken at a meeting in Philadelphia of the Waist Makers” (Reel 1 0404). They seemed to take these speaking engagements for granted, rarely commenting on the content or effect of these speeches, except in regard to suffrage, which I will examine in chapter six.

The final portion of their “argument” in favor of themselves as worthy partners was their ability to connect workers and the labor movement with the wider public and Progressive reform groups. In November of 1908, the minutes report that “we have been requested to co-operate in bringing before the people the Tuberculosis Exhibit which is going to open Nov 30th, and run until the middle of January. They are going to have a labor day with speeches for the labor people on December 13th and want our co-operation in bringing it specially before the unions. I have been to see F. Friedman & Co., in regard to the re-instatement of a girl who had been abused in a factory” (Reel 1 0391). In this somewhat odd pairing, we see the League’s placement of themselves as a connecting force on a public health issue and in the private life of an individual worker. In December of that year, they also record that “an announcement was made that the management of the Children’s Toy Festival had invited the league to give the folk dances during the festival which will be held from the 18th to the 26th at Madison Square Garden” (Reel

1 0394). In a matter more central to their overall program, they also acted as a link between the labor movement and the Manhattan Trade School, in an attempt to bring vocational training into line with union standards. One enlightening example of this can be seen in the following report from January of 1908:

At the request of the Alliance Employment Bureau and the Manhattan Trade School, I have tried to find out whether the employees locked out from the factories of the Jewelry Case Workers were still locked out. I have failed to receive any answers to my letters. The Jewelry Case Makers, as a union was one of those directly organized by the American Federation of Labor. I went to Mr. Robinson [an AFL organizer], who told me that he also had failed to make connections with them for many weeks. I told him that the Manhattan Trade School was training girls for such work, and they found they could not place them except in those shops where the lockout had taken place. I asked him whether he advised the Manhattan Trade School to hold off from placing those girls, when the union was apparently not in existence; he recommended that the Manhattan Trade School give up training girls for this work, as they were taking the place of men, and this had been the cause of the trouble between the employers and employees.” (Reel 1 0297)

On the one hand, this exchange demonstrates that the League is being sought out by employment agencies and trade schools because they are seen as experts on women in industry, but on the other, it shows them unable to find the information that they need and further demonstrates the great difficulties they face in trying to bring women wage earners into the labor movement when an AFL representative is so quick to blame an issue he is apparently not fully apprised of himself on working “girls” who displace “men.” In such a difficult arena, however, the League models its

worth not out of their absolute success in meeting their goals, but from the manner in which they conduct themselves and the motivations behind their efforts, always showing themselves as eager to help when asked, so long as they can do so while maintaining their adherence to the tenets of the AFL's brand of trade unionism.

Financial Cooperation

The next type of cooperation I would like to examine arises out of the League's financial endeavors. In these early years, the League's finances were limited, so that, rather than the large financial gestures we will see in the next time period, they were characterized more by the individual personal financial decisions that the League encouraged its members to make and by the more systematic efforts of the Label Committee of the League to improve working conditions for working-class women through the consumption habits of middle- and upper-class women. I will also examine one instance of the League's early attempts to deal with the issue of unemployment and some of their early decisions regarding contributions to workers' strikes. Again, our focus will be on how the League's reporting of their financial expenditures acted to build up their rhetorical posture of cooperation, demonstrating that League members forward the interests of labor both through League business and through their own consumption.

An early example of League members attempting to put their finances to work for labor can be found in their efforts for a group of waitresses employed, or formerly employed, at Macy's Department Store. We are told on March 28, 1907 that "with the help of patrons the plan of the committee is to visit those who were patrons of Macy's, telling them the Macy situation in regard to the waitresses, requesting them to use their influence to have the discharged waitresses reinstated" (Reel 1 0167-0168). Similarly, on August 22, 1907, the minutes report that "a letter

from the Grocery Clerks Union was referred to the Auxiliary Committee and the Secretary was instructed to acknowledge it and report that it had been read at the executive board meeting and all members requested not to purchase at store after 7p/m. and to not purchase at the stores on the black list” (Reel 1 0229). And again, in December of that year, we find that “letters have been sent to members of the League, not to renew subscriptions for ‘Charities and the Commons’ until it bears the Label” (Reel 1 0278). In all three of these cases, the League encourages its members to believe both that their purchasing power can make a difference in the lives of working people and that they can show their participation in the labor movement through their pocketbook. On the one hand, these activities are not unlike those of the Consumers’ League or women’s auxiliaries of the time, but their usefulness for building group identity within the League, and specifically a group identity rooted in cooperation, does not arise from their uniqueness but from the concrete opportunities they provide to allies to actively cooperate with labor even if they will never have the opportunity to join a union themselves or are not able to hop on a soap box and eloquently persuade others to do so.

Of course, such endeavors will be covered further in the next chapter as they are really more about affirming League members’ solidarity with the labor movement through their consumption, but I mention them here in order to introduce the Label Committee, which the League maintained to make these opportunities for financial cooperation more readily available through their work toward getting more manufacturers to adopt the union Label and the working conditions that were meant to accompany it. The 1907-1908 Annual Report provides an extensive overview of the activities of this committee:

The label committee is continuing its work along the lines it set out to do last year. Eleven 'Label talks' have been given to different unions and through personal visits, the writing of letters and the distribution of literature the label has been vigorously pushed. The committee has been exceptionally successful in its efforts to push the label of the Allied Printing Trades. Union label brooms and whisks can be found at more stores than last year. The committee has been active in creating a retail demand for neckties bearing the label. At the label fair last spring, at the Brooklyn Labor Lyceum, the League had a booth which aroused great interest. A carefully prepared directory of places in Brooklyn selling union label goods was exhibited. This directory was afterward extensively used in the preparation of the union goods directory and was largely responsible for its publication. A dummy dressed entirely in union label clothes and holding in its hands labeled articles was the principal feature of the fair. There is no question that many people went away with a new sense of the value of the label and with a feeling of satisfaction that no man need wear non-union clothes, as all clothing for men can be purchased with the label. (Reel 22 0013)

The following year, the committee added to all this the actual selling of label items themselves, deciding to "first stimulate a demand and later approach the stores" (Reel 22 0029), and reporting in their first two months of operation that it "has filed 100 orders amounting to \$129.20" (Reel 22 0030).

Despite the glowing descriptions of it in the annual reports, however, the Label Committee would prove to be a frequent battle ground as factionalism and individual priorities fought to overcome the fiction of unity the League so desperately needed to create among

members. The first indication of this that we get in the record appears in June of 1909 when Elizabeth Dutcher, a Vassar grad, Socialist Party member, and League loose cannon, laments in a league meeting “that the shirt waists had been a disappointment to the Committee, and she felt that the League had not been fair in purchasing the shirt waists, she thought it should be bought by members whether it suited them or not” (Reel 1 0466). This complaint is followed by her request that there be “discussion on the relation between the label committee work and the work of the League - where the label committee work ended, and where the League work began, or in other words the jurisdiction of the label committee” (Reel 1 0466). The record of the results of that discussion highlight both the League’s attempts to overcome this issue with cooperation and the continuing likelihood that this committee, and Dutcher, will be a problem:

Miss Dutcher’s report was accepted with the general sense of the Board that the line of demarcation between the League and the Label Committee was that the League had to do with the direct work of organizing the trades, and that the Label Committee had to deal with all arrangements with manufacturers for carrying the label and with the advertising and pushing of label goods on the general consuming public. It was also the general opinion of the Board that it would be better to have the finances of the Label Committee consolidated with the general finances of the League. Miss Dutcher seemed to feel that this was not practical and that a separated treasury was necessary. (Reel 1 0466)

In addition to these efforts at indirect financial support for trade unionism, the League did engage in some direct support. One example of this can be found in their dealings with Local 102, mentioned above, as their 1907-1908 Annual Report states that “the League has kept the needs of this union before the United Garment Workers of America. It employed a special

organizer for the local for several months, but discontinued after proving to the U.G.W. of A. the necessity for its appointment of an organizer” (Reel 22 0006). Considering that when the record mentions the weekly salary of other organizers it is usually somewhere between \$18 and \$25, financing an organizer for several months is no minor expense. They also engaged in raising strike funds through their membership, noting in the 1907-1908 Annual Report regarding the Commercial Telegraphers’ strike that “The League issued a letter to its members and others stating the cause of the strike and the strike situation; it secured strike contributions amounting to \$132.28. Since the strike it has been doing what it could to secure work for those who were blacklisted” (Reel 22 0005). While they considered this contribution to be somewhat out of the ordinary for them, stating in August of 1908 that “a motion was carried that the League should not give financial aid to the Newark strikers as it was against its policy to help any strike except one of extraordinary public interest” (Reel 1 0362), their efforts to find employment for the blacklisted workers was in keeping with their general concern over unemployment, which led them in a problematic direction in 1908. The 1908-1909 Annual Report gives the following description:

The strain of trying to find work for unemployed women at last forced the league to create employment. . . A sewing shop was opened for the purpose of training these women to repair wardrobes. Orders were secured also for light dressmaking, such as the making of shirt waists and summer dresses. For several weeks the West Side Neighborhood House gave space to the shop. In June, through the interest of Hartley House and its supporters, the shop was transferred to the Hartley House Settlement and re-organized under the name of the Ship Shape Shop. There are now thirty-two women

working in the shop. Fifty-six in all have received training since the shop was opened. The shop is not yet on a paying basis, but it has given valuable training to women and secured work for a large number for varying periods. It has given these women a living wage and an eight-hour day. The league has had no direct connection with the shop since the management was undertaken by Hartley House. The workers in the shop are gradually becoming members of the Dressmakers' Union. (Reel 22 0034-0035)

The rapidity with which the League turned over this endeavor to the settlements gives some indication that they did not wish to be engaged in philanthropic busy-work, as does their insistence on classifying it as training for an additional trade. Their concern over unemployment, both that caused by a general downturn in the economy and that provoked by women's involvement in organization, would persist into later years.

Legislative and Political Cooperation

The final category I will be examining in terms of cooperation is centered on how they recount their forays into the political realm. Because this chapter is focused more on concrete actions, there is not much to discuss during the early years of the organization. As we shall see in the next chapter, the League frequently sent letters or resolutions condemning, praising, or recommending a particular action of the legislature, mayor, governor, or President, but they weren't very actively engaged in trying to influence legislation at this point. They did make some efforts in regard to unemployment and the extension of hours for women working in seasonal trades, as well as some work on suffrage, but I will only look at the first two here.

As for unemployment, in May of 1908 we find that Leonora O'Reilly has "attended a hearing before the Senate Finance Committee on the bill to provide for a commission to enquire

into unemployment. She said that the committee received the delegation most [cavalierly] and there seemed to be a tendency to discredit the bill. There was however, to be a hearing before the Ways & Means Committee in the Assembly. Miss O'Reilly's report was accepted and she was requested to attend the second hearing" (Reel 1 0329). This action was further described in the 1908-1909 Annual Report, stating that "a representative appeared before legislative committees to urge the appointment of a commission to inquire into unemployment and to protest against the lengthening of hours of women in seasonal trades" (Reel 22 0034). In this concern over unemployment, we see the League working to show their cooperation with women workers even when they aren't in a position to join a union, or when doing so has caused them to be fired. The message it sends to members is that the League is present for working women all the time. The final example I have to offer in this section is actually a negative one from May of 1908, in which they explain why they did not engage in a particular action: "The resolution of the board to endorse the legislative bills requiring an investigation of lower courts and immigration was not carried out because the president discovered that action would not be valuable" (Reel 1 0331). I include it because it demonstrates that the League is clearly thinking through their actions, and it is interesting that they would choose the word "valuable" rather than, say, "effective." It implies that they know that many of their actions in regard to the legislature may not produce a legal change, but that they still see some of them as useful regardless, perhaps because they demonstrate the identity the League wishes to project.

Revolution in the Garment Trades: 1909-1913

Worthy Partners

As we enter the second time period outlined by Nancy Schrom Dye, we can begin to perceive certain changes in the way the League attempted to build up their image of cooperation by listening, anticipating needs, teaching union principles, and acting as liaisons. Their confidence grew with their experience during this highly active period leading to some dynamic shifts in their actions and, more importantly, their justifications of those actions. It would be impossible to cover all of their coalition building activities during these four years in the space I have available, so I will focus on their involvement in several key strikes with a nod towards those actions that are a continuation of efforts covered in the last section.

In the months leading up to the great Shirtwaist Strike, the League's focus was on providing speakers to groups like the neckwear makers, who were addressed with "a good straight trade union talk" in July (Reel 1 0479), and the corset workers, who benefitted from League street meetings that same month (Reel 1 0481-0482), as well as providing continued advice and instruction on organization, such as to a union of laundry workers whom the League encouraged in August to "go rather slowly and to do intensive rather than extensive work," turning down "their proposition that we help them organize in Brooklyn and Hoboken . . . telling them we could not do good work outside of Manhattan and advised them to confine their efforts to Manhattan also" (Reel 1 0502). These records showed League members what types of cooperation they ought to value and also how they ought to interpret the League's policies in terms of those actions. Additionally, League members were encouraged that their long-time

efforts were beginning to pay off, with Helen Marot commenting in her September Secretary's report that:

I should like to add that I was convinced at the meeting I attended of the finishers on Labor Day that the three years work we had with the United Garment Workers in trying to persuade them of the necessity in organizing the women, and our apparent failure at that time is now bearing fruit. The United Garment Workers have turned out in force for the women finishers. I should say that our position with the Garment Workers should be that of a constant spectator, and perhaps for some time a rather silent one. I think our simple presence at the meetings will be a sufficient stimulus at a time at least to keep the national officers and the district council at the work. (Reel 1 0502)

They were also upbeat in regard to the likelihood of participation and harmony in their own ranks, noting that "we have strengthened all these committees this year with new members. The prospects of co-operation are very good but the prospects of work are even better" (Reel 1 0507).

In October, we see their involvement in the Triangle Shirtwaist strike, one of the precursors to the general strike that erupted in November. One major element of that involvement was picketing. As they described it, "picketing had been immediately established in the case of the Triang[le] Waist Co., Outrageous methods were used by the employers to interfere with peaceful picketing. For three evenings members of the League picketed and watched the detectives and thugs who were employed in large forces" (Reel 1 0508). In regard to this strike, they also did what they could "to bring influence to bear on the Tammany magistrates who are to try the girls" and advised "the Union to consent to accept counsel from the League. They are paying their lawyer \$100. and he has not succeeded in preventing the imposition of the fine in

any case” (Reel 1 0509). During the same October meeting, they reported on their participation with the strikers from another shirtwaist factory, Leiserson’s, telling how they had sent a committee of members and workers to meet with the owner, who nevertheless refused to take back eight of the striking workers (Reel 1 0509). In these examples, there is less emphasis on the League responding to a specific request and more on them meeting definite needs, and this theme continued as the strikes wore on, though they appear to have been somewhat conflicted over their preemptive measures. To illustrate, at their November 13, 1909 Executive Board meeting we see the following exchange:

The meeting was called to order to consider the attitude of the board in regard to the police interference in the strike of the Triangle Waist Company. Miss Dutcher moved that the League’s members and friends should picket three times a week until the strike was called off. The motion was carried. The secretary moved that the League should take an active part in preventing police interference in all strikes in which women were concerned. Mr. Healy amended the motion to read ‘The League should take an active part in preventing police interference in all strikes in which women were concerned when called upon.’

This amendment was accepted by Miss Marot.

Mr. Boyle then moved that the motion be amended by adding ‘If the part the League took did not interfere with its part in picketing for the Triangle Waist Company’s strikers.’

The motion was carried as amended. (Reel 1 0514)

They seem to be trying to maintain the image of a worthy partner as one who waits to be asked for help, but they don't want to do so at the risk of interfering with the dynamic campaign they already had underway.

On November 17, 1909, the record nonchalantly reports that the League President, heiress Mary Dreier, was arrested while helping with picket duty for the Shirtwaist Makers (Reel 1 0516), but it is in February that we get the most complete listing of their stellar participation record in the general strike. It is worth examining at length in order to note some of the differences between it and the account contained in the 1909-1910 Annual Report for later analysis:

“Miss Marot reported in a general way on the work the League members had done for the strike. She stated that they had charge of all the courts with the exception of one since the week before Christmas; that eight lawyers had volunteered their services and three were paid; that a fifty thousand dollar Surety Bond had been furnished by three members; that Miss Lewisohn had given bail a number of times, and that Miss Woerishoffer had been in the Jefferson Market Court with the deed for bailing out girls for over a month, and had given valuable service in assisting the lawyers. The League had charge of from sixty to seventy five volunteer pickets during the strike; they helped in the settlement of shops; they help over fifty meetings of . . . shops; they done (*sic*) weeks of educational work, speaking to the various groups of strikers during the strike; they had organized a parade of 10,000 girls to present a petition to the Mayor; had run in the newspaper a strike story for six weeks; had organized parlor meetings; college meetings, club meetings; large meeting at Grand Central Palace; had edited special editions of the New York Call and

the Journal; had brought the police aggression before the attention of the Mayor, and had secured his co-operation; had helped extensively in the Italian work, and had collected in all for the strikers \$20,000.” (Reel 1 0538)

The more extensive account of the Annual Report began with a paragraph praising the women strikers and the unions that aided them before turning to the League’s contributions as follows:

Having made the above disavowal we may now summarize as briefly as possible the League’s work without fear of losing its proportionate value. Before the General Strike was called a volunteer picket corps was organized, surely the first that was ever recruited outside of labor’s own ranks, to help the strikers of the Triangle Waist Company. The League demonstrated at this time that it knew how to arouse public sympathy, appeal against police outrages and to work side by side with the strikers. This work of the League was seized on by the Union as a preliminary skirmish for the great fight to follow. The Union saw that the workers had been awakened through the publicity of the Triangle strike, to a sense of a common cause. They realized that it was the opportune moment to organize the trade. . . . The members of the [picket] corps accepted whatever rough treatment was offered and when arrested asked for no favors that were not given to the strikers themselves. (Reel 22 0051)

After this description of pickets, the report named five male lawyers who had volunteered their services, giving detailed and glowing accounts of their efforts. The report continued:

Both Miss Rembaugh and Miss Horovitz volunteered their services and were employed as well for a time by the League. They both rendered successful service. No less remarkable than the services of the lawyers was the service of one of the members of the

League, who stayed every day from December 21st to January 27th in Jefferson Market Court, bailing girls out from that court as well as from the Centre Street Court, also rebonding them for Special and General Sessions, furnishing bail in all to the extent of \$29,000. She also assisted the lawyers in interviewing the accused. She instructed the strikers in regard to their rights as pickets as well as through the bewildering mysteries of court procedure. Her work was managed so successfully that she won the respect of the court and was able to secure such valuable reforms as the appointment of competent court interpreters. Several times other members of the League furnished bail for the strikers. Four members guaranteed a surety bond which was used for bail, amounting to fifty thousand dollars. (Reel 22 0052)

It is of note in this section that while the male lawyers and paid League member attorneys are named, the other League members are kept anonymous, despite some of them having been previously identified in the meeting minutes of the League, contributing to the sense of unified, collective action on the part of League members.

Despite the claimed effort at brief summarization, the report continued, describing the League's "systematic work on the illegal action of the Police Department, beginning with the Triangle Strike early in October and continuing throughout the General Strike" (Reel 22 0053), mentioning that "one member of the League served for three weeks as secretary to the Secretary of the Union" (Reel 22 0053), that another "took charge of conferences with shop delegates and sent competent trade unionists to answer requests of employers for settlement" (Reel 22 0053), and "two other members organized, over night, the parade of ten thousand strikers, which marched to City Hall and appealed to Mayor McClellan for police protection" (Reel 22 0053).

The litany of what these unnamed contributors, united under the name “member,” performed continued on:

The great mass meeting held at Grand Central Palace was also organized by a member of the League; . . . One of the members had entire supervision of the shops which met at the League, advising the strikers and paying their benefits. At all strike conferences two members of the League were present as representatives of the Union. The League’s Publicity Committee carried the story of the strike almost continuously in all the newspapers for nine weeks. . . .

One of the members of the League organized a committee to appeal to and visit unions for financial assistance. . . .

For the whole thirteen weeks trade union instruction was proffered the new unionists by its army of volunteer workers. During the first three weeks many League members spoke continuously at shop meetings, some of them covering thirteen and fourteen shop meetings a day. Many members answered the numerous appeals from outside clubs, churches and other organizations, for strike speeches, but it was impossible, with the claims of the strikers, to fill all demands. (Reel 22 0053-0054)

Following this extensive involvement, the League outlined a plan for their future involvement in strikes: “First: Organization of the direction of public opinion. Second: Picketing and fair play in the Courts. Third: Funds through Unions and allies. Fourth: Trade Union instruction” (Reel 1 550), however, they also continued to offer English classes as part of their strike aid, noting in May of 1910 regarding a group of striking Polish baggers that:

the people spoke no English whatsoever and the organizer for the Sugar Refiners was trying to help them. Both Miss Marot and I spoke at the meeting, in spite of the fact that they could not understand English, and told them that the League was willing to help them in any way possible. I have been over there several times since and finally with the co-operation of Mr. Stickles the Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. of Greenpoint have arranged for English Classes. When the workers were asked at the meeting if they would like to have English taught to them there was hardly a hand that was not raised. The first class had about 400 present. (Reel 1 0583)

They also continued to record their responses to requests for English classes as necessary preparation for organization, as this excerpt from their June 22, 1911 meeting makes clear:

“Education Committee. Miss Dreier reported that the 8th Assembly District wished classes in English started at once. Miss Heimel feels that the organization of the district depends entirely upon the formation of an English class. Moved by Miss Marot and seconded by Miss Pike that a Committee be appointed to investigate this request and decide if it would be practical to start a class now. CARRIED” (Reel 1 0789). Through the descriptions of the League offering English classes, a picture emerges of the League as a center for improved communication, encouraging members to view their work as such.

While this time period saw an increase in the League’s efforts to cooperate with new groups of workers, such as their March of 1910 attempt “to see what could be done in placing the colored girls in the shirt waist factories” (Reel 1 0557) and their involvement that December stating that “at the request of the National Colored Association, your secretary spoke at a meeting at Berkley Theatre on the subject of the exclusion of the Negroes from the trade unions and

requested the National Colored Association to send in specific complaints against the unions and the League will see that an investigation is made into the matter” (Reel 1 0666), many of their recorded activities after the 1909 shirtwaist strike highlight a growing distrust of the general strike as a method of organization and negotiation, and by extension, an increasing interest in focusing their efforts on “American” workers. This shift can be found in the added commentary accompanying their descriptions of the help they gave, which emphasized the idea that the League knew better when to call and how to run a strike than did the unions. One notable example of this can be found in the meeting minutes from July 9, 1910:

The regular order of business was suspended to hear the delegates from the Neckwear Makers Union and the Ladies Tailors and Dressmakers Union. The Committee from the Neckwear Makers requested the moral support of the League in calling the general strike of the inside Neckwear Makers of New York City . . . They specially requested that the League join with the Union in calling a mass meeting as a preliminary to organizing the trade. After due consideration a motion was carried that a committee be appointed to look into the organizing of the Neckwear Makers and co-operate with them in regard to calling a mass meeting on the understanding that no strike should be called through the mass meeting. (Reel 1 0604)

Here we see them attempting to remain cooperative while avoiding being associated with or seen as encouraging another general strike.

In cases where a strike had already been called or was eminent, the League began asking for representation on unions’ strike councils before giving their assistance. For instance, we find that “The League was regularly and officially called upon to co-operate with the Cloak Makers in

their strike,” which involved some 60,000 workers, 15% of whom were women (Reel 1 0609), and the July 20, 1910 report gleefully records that the Strike Committee of the union was more than happy to accept the League’s involvement, stating that “a motion was carried that they request us to be members of their Committee and that they would consider it a privilege to have us advise with them” (Reel 1 0610). The following month, Helen Marot included in her Secretary’s report the following description of their further work on this strike:

The League has done considerable work with the Cloak Makers, besides attending the strike council meetings, Miss Schneiderman and I were delegated to undertake the settlements with the manufacturers of the alteration hands. The possibility of effecting anything was a forlorn hope, however, under the name of the Cloak Makers Union we sent out letters to employers, from whose houses the alteration hands had been called out, giving the price lists as demanded by the strikers, and asking for a conference. Three manufacturers in all responded, and these manufacturers covered hardly more than one half dozen employees.” (Reel 1 0619)

The use of “forlorn hope” and “hardly” seem to indicate a waning enthusiasm for what can be accomplished through the general strike, and the description on September 28, 1911 of their work with the Boot and Shoe Workers Union continued that theme by saying “Miss Dreier reported that the Boot & Shoe Workers Union had requested the League to co-operate with them in picketing and in visiting strike breakers. The League had done so, but it was not clear as to the value of its co-operation in the manner requested” (Reel 1 0836).

Similarly, we can see the League shying away from working with unions that won’t grant them the reciprocal authority so graciously offered them by the Cloak Makers’ Union. Their

justification of what occurred between them and the Neckwear Makers' Union is worth examining at length:

In accordance with a request of the Neckwear Makers last July, a committee was appointed by the League to take up the matter of co-operation with the Union in a general strike to be called in October. The Committee met and decided to look into the matter before promising to what extent they would co-operate. The organizer of the Neckwear Makers met the committee and said that the Neckwear Makers Union, which was entirely Jewish and composed of the workers in the contract shops specially needed the services of the League in the organization of the American girls in the inside houses, that is the houses of the manufacturers. The organizer agreed at the request of the committee to call a meeting of the label shops of the neckwear makers also a meeting of the members of the union working in the inside houses so that the League could converse with the workers and understand the situation in the trade. The organizer agreed to call this meeting but the League received no communication whatever from the neckwear makers until a week before the calling of the strike. The League had in the meantime discharged the committee. When the Union discovered that the League had done nothing towards the organization of the girls in the American houses they went to the organizer of the American Federation of Labor who was co-operating with them and he immediately called a conference between the representatives of the League and the representatives of the Union.

A motion was carried that the League help in the strike by co-operating with Mr. Frayne, organizer of the A.F. of L. and the Neckwear Cutters for the organization of the American girls. (Reel 1 0628-0629)

Now, aside from sounding like a case of playground tattling, this account demonstrates one way the League was justifying their move away from Jewish workers and the tactics of their organizations, and it does so in a way that leaves the League looking like a willing cooperant dealing with difficult and uncommunicative men. The League's interactions with the White Goods Workers in May of 1911 reveal a similar pattern, with them trying to get one of their own hired in at one of the factories "so that she may organize among the American girls and that we may show at the time of the meeting of the International Ladies Garment Workers that it was possible to organize from the inside without calling a general strike" (Reel 1 0769).

The most emphatic disavowals of unquestioning cooperation, however, emerged in relation to the threat of another general strike in the shirtwaist trade in 1911. While not all League members had lost faith in the general strike by then (Rose Schneiderman still felt it was necessary at times, for instance (Reel 1 0630)), Helen Marot certainly had and inveighed against it most viciously in June, declaring "the calling of the general strike in the shirt waist trade would be no more disastrous than if the leaders of the Ladies Tailors called through their men speaking a foreign tongue the American and French dressmakers in their up town shops out on a strike. The Union agreed almost a year ago to do nothing in this matter without consulting the League. They agreed that when they felt the time had come for organizing the girls in the trade they would turn to the League and ask that the League take charge of such organizing. I believe that the Executive Board should hold them to this condition" (Reel 1 0794). That October, the League

actually refused to send speakers to the union and told them “we would appreciate their not using the name of the League” (Reel 1 0845), an unheard of step for them, which they did recognize as such. Marot expounded on this new version of cooperation in her report of the same month:

I want to call the attention of the members to the fact that the League in taking the action it has in regard to the Shirt Waist Makers has made a departure from its past policy. Up to the present time the League has always co-operated with the unions to the full in accordance with the plans the union has mapped out; in taking the position with the Shirt Waist Makers the League has for the first time changed our policy and as I understand it, it is not confined to the Shirt Waist Makers, but it is the stand which we must continue in regard to the methods followed by the East Side Unions. As the Jewish working women are greater numerically than any other nationality it will be necessary for us if we are to make them understand our refusal to accept their methods to show them what our methods are; and the League having been the kind sister must be able to show absolute results in organization. It seems to me that the League should seriously consider throwing its energy into pushing organization among other groups of workers, keeping the door always open to the working women connected with the East Side unions giving them always the opportunity to come into organizations on the basis approved by the American trade unionists. (Reel 1 0848-0849)

While the League did enthusiastically support the (failed) Laundry Workers’ Strike in 1912 (Reel 1 0918-0919), they also continued to work against other general strikes, stating in October of 1912 that “a Special Meeting of the Strike Council was called and Miss Schneiderman was employed to work up organization of the White Goods Workers in the hope that active

organization work might prevent the general strike” (Reel 1 1059). This is particularly telling as it claims the motivation for organization isn’t the direct benefit of the workers but the prevention of a tactic the League has come to dislike.

Financial Cooperation

I turn now to the League’s financial cooperation during this dynamic time of strikes. These years saw a dramatic increase in the League’s ability to contribute large sums to strike relief with a simultaneous growth in their discretion as to which strikes they would contribute. Their union label work continued to be an important part of how they defined and drew members into their cooperation, though fund-raising for strike relief also took on a more prominent role in involving allies and the general public. As the League’s finances increased, their payroll also became central to demonstrating their emerging values in terms of building their image as a group as well as indicating changing priorities in regard to with whom they ought to connect themselves, as they hired organizers to reach new trades or groups of workers and also phased out organizers for other groups. In all of these endeavors, it is important to note not only the way the League put their money where their mouth was, but also how they put their mouth where their money was, attempting to align their expenditures with their ideology through their descriptions of where their money was going, especially when there might appear to be a conflict of interests, or when tensions among members were likely highest. Finally, I will look at instances where the League experienced or expected reciprocity in their financial cooperation during this time.

Now we already saw in the last section the extensive involvement of the League in the 1909 Shirtwaist Strike, which included the League raising some \$20,000 for the strikers (Reel 1

0538), as well as putting up \$79,000 for bail bonds (Reel 22 0052), but it is in their later and admittedly smaller contributions that their rhetorical use of finances is most pronounced. The first such instance to consider is recorded on October 11, 1910 when we find that:

Miss Marot stated that she had received a contribution of ten thousand dollars to be used for strike purposes and that the donor's only condition in making the gift was that the name of the donor be withheld. Miss Marot also stated that the donor approved of her plan to use the fund to anticipate strikes by strengthening organization of women workers in trades where strikes are threatened and where peaceful methods of settlement have failed to co-operate with unions in bringing strikes to a successful issue. The Board voted to accept the gift on condition that it would be used for this purpose and requested the secretary to convey gratitude. (Reel 1 0629)

In the act of accepting a gift to create an ongoing strike fund, Marot included a statement that would allow the League to use the funds to prevent a strike as well as support one, encouraging them through that statement to do just that, and their use of the fund tended to reinforce the allegiances described in the last section.

While the League was quick to send \$1000.00 from their strike fund to aid the Chicago WTUL during the garment strike there in December of 1910 (Reel 1 0659) and eagerly approved another \$1000, plus more after the fact, to be given to the Laundry Workers' strike in January of 1912 (Reel 1 0924-0925), they were hesitant about opening up their coffers to just anyone. They outright refused a request from the Central Federated Union in September of 1911 to "send a donation [to] help the Marble Workers in their strike," carrying a motion "to write to the Secretary of the Central Federated Union that the League had no funds for donations" (Reel 1

0835). A clearer picture of the attitude League members had toward spending their strike fund emerges in the following Secretary's report from June 22, 1911:

There is a report in circulation that the Shirt Waist Makers and the Ladies Tailors are considering a general strike, the latter of the Dressmakers in their up town shops. While nothing has been said officially to the League I think it would be well for us to discuss the attitude of the League towards both propositions. I think there is no doubt that a general strike would be a failure in the Shirt Waist trade as the unions' weakness is the reason for its resorting to this method and the weakness of its officers to make good. It has also lost the confidence of its members. It is hardly conceivable that the girls working in the shops having received no material benefit since the last strike will answer to another call. I understand that the International is going to do all it can to discourage a general strike. Personally I think the Leagues' expressing any opinion until it is called upon for any co-operation would be a mistake. I recommend that if the strike is called that the League assist so far as is possible in picketing and helping release girls from jail. This the League must do as it can never take a neutral position in a strike. But I further recommend that the League withhold financial assistance and if the opinion of the officers on the strike is asked for that they be authorized to express the attitude of the Board. (Reel 1 0793)

Aside from the entertainment value of this denunciation of *expressing* an opinion that is clearly already held, this excerpt highlights the distinction that League members drew between the type of cooperation that could directly benefit the working women they were seeking to help (by preventing police brutality as they picketed or releasing them from jail as quickly as possible if

they could not prevent it) and that with the male leadership that dominated during general strikes, of whose methods they disapproved.

As the last example implies, the League was not always inclined to help a union by directly contributing to their strike fund, but that didn't mean that they refused to cooperate financially with them. On the one hand, they might donate money for a specific purpose, as they did in December of 1910, noting that "a motion was carried that sufficient money be paid over from the treasury of the Strike Council to the Ladies Waist Makers Conference to employ Mr. Maily, or someone equally efficient as the business manager of the Conference" (Reel 1 0668), in a pretty clear attempt to get the union to come into line with the business ideology of the League. With another group, on the other hand, they might combine such a gift with suggestions for helping them to raise their own money, as when they met with a committee from the Leather Goods Workers in July of 1911 and the following exchange was recorded:

General discussion on raising money for the Leather Goods Workers followed. The President suggested that some of the girls go out as sandwich girls to collect money. Miss Scott suggested that the League offer to hire a hand organ for the Leather Workers. It was also suggested that they send a Committee to the Central Federated Union. Moved by Miss Scott seconded by Miss Svenson that the Board authorize the President to write to some of the members of the League and ask them to contribute to the Leather Workers strike and further authorize her to give to individual needy cases to the extent of \$50.00. CARRIED." (Reel 1 0822)

At other times, the League clearly engaged in reciprocal financial exchanges as part of their attempts to build up a partnership with unions. Before trying to hire a business manager for

them, the League had attempted to get the Ladies Waist Makers Union to cooperate with the League by using, and helping to pay for, their Italian organizer, Mr. Caroti. As the record shows, “Mr. Caroti is now entirely working for the League and it was suggested that they pay \$10.00 a week using Mr. Caroti’s part time” (Reel 1 0595). It does not appear that the union ever took them up on this proposition of a time-share organizer, but the mere mention of it shows how they envisioned themselves working in a close, personal way with the unions. Rose Schneiderman, the League’s East Side Organizer at the time, reported in October of 1910 that the White Goods Union, on the other hand, because “she was devoting so much of her time to [them] desired to contribute something to the League every month” (Reel 1 0630). She further reported that they “had voted to [be] affiliated with the League. They donated \$50 to the [League’s annual fund-raising] Ball, and appointed a committee to visit East side Unions. They are planning a series of Sunday evening Lectures and requested the League to co-operate with them. Moved by Miss Scott that we respond to the Waist makers request to co-operate with them in their lectures. -- Carried” (Reel 1 0631). We see here how financial cooperation went hand in hand with other forms of cooperation.

We can see this principle at work as well in the League’s use of payroll. The clearest example is in their decision to employ Melinda Scott as “an organizer whose work would be the organization of American working women” at the salary of \$18 per week beginning in October of 1910 (Reel 1 0618), for which purpose they sent out letters to members asking for contributions (Reel 1 0610), and then in August of 1912, we get this impassioned plea for her increase in salary from Helen Marot:

I have for some time wanted to bring before the board the question of Miss Scott's salary. Some time ago the National Executive Board fixed the rate of organizer at \$3.00 a day. That is what we have been paying. Miss Scott is in a very different position from the general organizer who goes out and does what she is told to do. Her position here is one of responsibility. It is she who has to plan, originate, decide what course is best and what course is not best for us to follow. It is a far heavier and more responsible work than she had in her own trade, and I think she should be considered quite differently from an ordinary organizer. We all of us turn to her as an expert and we are influenced by her in our decisions of the most important work of the League. Miss Scott takes responsibility very heavily and we have put her in an unusually responsible position. I want to suggest that Miss Scott be paid \$25.00 a week. (Reel 1 1034-1035)

When Elizabeth Dutcher requested through the Retail Clerks Committee in January of 1912 "that the League pay for an organizer \$60.00 per month for six months," however, "a motion was carried that a communication be sent to the Retail Clerks Committee stating that it was impossible for the League to pay for an organizer at the present time," though they did approve the committee's request for \$5.00 per month for expenses, presumably demonstrating the limits of their support for the committee's efforts (Reel 1 0930). By October of 1912, the League appeared to have downgraded their commitment to their efforts with Italian women, as well, as "the Board voted to contribute \$5.00 per month to the Italian Committee in place of the \$25.00 for Miss Fugazy [who worked as an organizer] whose time ends Nov. 1st." (Reel 1 1071).

As I have already mentioned Elizabeth Dutcher, it seems natural to turn our attention to her other beloved League committee, the Label Committee. June of 1909 saw the League

actively working for union made bread (Reel 1 0462), an effort that continued the following June with the report that “several members of the League have been working actively with Mrs. Allen of the Socialist Party making a house to house canvas in their neighborhood persuading the women to demand the Union Label bread. Miss Ecob, Miss Parks and Miss Franklin who are all members of the Label Committee are the members who have been actively working with the Socialist Party” (Reel 1 0594). This association of the Label Committee with the Socialist Party is worth keeping in mind, although their association with the Consumers’ League, and later the Central Union Label Council, was perhaps more influential. Both likely contributed to the tension that continually arose between the Label Committee and the rest of the League during this time. To illustrate, we are told in December of 1909 that:

Miss Kellor reported that she had secured \$1500. for the investigation of working conditions of women in the retail shops, she was at liberty to use this fund to make an investigation in the name of the Consumers’ League and the Women’s Trade Union League. Miss Kellor stated that the investigation was important from several points of view. The proposition was fully discussed and a motion carried that the work of the investigation committee should be an investigation of trades with which the League is co-operated for organization purposes.

A motion was carried that the Bake Shop investigation be put into the hands of the investigating committee.

A motion was carried that the investigation of the Shirt Waist Makers be referred to the Investigation Committee, as a subject needing immediate attention. (Reel 1 0524-0525)

Granted, this quote is purportedly about the investigating committee rather than the Label Committee, but the mention of retail clerks and the Consumers' League generally indicate the involvement of the Label Committee, as we shall see. What is interesting here is the seeming miscommunication that occurs when the League appears willing to accept funds that are earmarked for the purpose of investigating a trade that they believe to be nearly impossible to organize and therefore ought to be approached with extreme caution (Reel 1 0680). They carry a motion that defines the work of the investigating committee as devoted to the trades they are actively trying to organize, but then proceed to dump more work onto the committee as if they will have the resources to tackle it by accepting the offered, designated funds. The Consumers' League approached the League again in March of 1911, asking the League's "advise in regard to the investigation of the Retail Clerks. They say they have absolutely no material and need material to work for the minimum wages law. They are seriously considering putting in an investigator, if they do this they say they will be glad to have the investigator give us any hold on the stores that is possible" (Reel 1 0718). In this instance, it appears that the Consumers' League is attempting to align their mission with the ideology of the League by emphasizing the potential help their information could give towards organization.

The tension between the main body of the League and the Label Committee played out in other areas, as well. For example, both Mary Dreier, then President of the League, and Elizabeth Dutcher, Chairman of the Label Committee, encouraged League members to purchase Label Waists at the May 2, 1910 meeting (Reel 1 0573, 0576), and when Dutcher announced on July 10, 1911 "that the Central Label Union Council had been organized and had an affiliated membership of thirty thousand. Mr. Starr as President and Mr. Peter Brady as Secretary and Miss

Elizabeth Dutcher as Treasurer. Miss Dutcher also reported that the Socialist Party had offered to co-operate in distributing literature” (Reel 1 0799), a motion was carried that same night “that the Women’s Trade Union League affiliate with the Central Label Union Council dues \$2.00 per month” (Reel 1 0801). Issues arose, however, in regard to finances. When Dutcher tried in April of 1911 to raise funds for a Label Conference from the League, the response was recorded that “it was the sense of the meeting that the League’s contribution of its meeting hall which was equal to \$10.00 to \$7.00 per meeting should be its contribution” (Reel 1 0745). Similarly, we see in November of 1912 that “in the absence of the Chairman Miss Bean at the request of the [Label] Committee asked that the League print the list of lectures which are being given by the Central Union Label Council in the next Bulletin. A motion was carried that it be suggested to the Label Committee that the League would be glad to enclose a slip announcing the C. Label Council lectures or to print same in the Bulletin if the Council paid for the printing.” (Reel 1 1085). This snarky exchange was followed in December by another difference of opinion regarding a corset boycott the Label Committee was advocating as follows:

She also stated that the committee was trying to get information as to where the Kalamazoo Corsets were being sold. Several of the members of the League seemed to think it hardly necessary to get a list of all the stores which were selling the corsets in New York and that the boycott could be carried on without waiting for such information. Miss Percival stated that her committee considered it a misplacement of time to carry on a boycott which would have no results. Report of the committee accepted and filed. (Reel 1 1095)

Clearly there were some discrepancies in their views regarding the proper use of the League's resources which threatened the appearance of unified action within the League even as it enabled one faction of the League to better cooperate with outside organizations.

These issues compounded when Dutcher and other members of the Label Committee formed a Retail Clerks Committee to work for the organization of retail clerks. Despite reservations, the League had become interested in this endeavor through their involvement in a boycott of Macy's in November of 1910 (Reel 1 0648-0649, 0680), but the advent of the Retail Clerks Committee was marked by hesitation and distrust, as evidenced by the motion that they passed on February 29, 1912, "that the Committee be empowered to raise the necessary funds from contributors and that the names of possible contributors be first submitted to the Finance Committee of the League and that no requests for funds be made to those whom the Committee consider in the light of possible contributors to the General League Fund" (Reel 1 0937-0938). Despite the upbeat account of the League's faith in Dutcher's committees that appeared in the 1909-1910 Annual Report, that "the League during the spring months recognized the work of the Committee by giving it a little office of its own and also assigning a secretary to help in its detail work and large correspondence, - a correspondence which includes not only all auxiliaries and unions, but sympathizers from Montana to Texas (Reel 22 0056), the League seemed to want to keep a tight rein on the purse strings and actions of her committees, with consequences that played out over the next few years.

Legislative and Political Cooperation

I can't possibly talk about this time in the League's history without discussing the incredible efforts they made to bring various groups together in New York and New Jersey to

work at making factories safe from fire. Initially inspired by a tragic fire in Newark, NJ and then further spurred on by the loss of their own friends, whom they had worked with during the general strike of 1909-1910, who were killed in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 1911, the League embarked on a massive campaign to makeover and enforce fire safety laws. I will focus in this chapter on the concrete actions toward reform that the League engaged in as they attempted to build new coalitions and reinforce old ones toward a new goal, but I will revisit their efforts in the next chapter as these fires certainly acted as catalysts to ideological solidarity, as well. During this time, they also increased their efforts at getting laws passed that would limit the number of hours women could work per week or per day, which led them down an interesting rabbit hole that I like to call “The League Discovers PowerPoint and Attempts to Take It on a State Wide Tour.” Finally, I will look briefly at a few examples that illustrate the League’s developing vision of themselves in relation to political endorsements and campaigns.

The League’s efforts towards fire safety began on December 5, 1910 when they passed a resolution in regard to it and then carried a motion “that the League start agitation for a more thorough observation of the fire escape law and other protection against loss of life at the time of fire and secure the co-operation of the unions of Greater New York and that the matter be referred to the Legislative Committee and the press be notified” (Reel 1 0655). We can see from the start that they were looking to enlist the cooperation of the labor movement, the government, and the wider public. Their first efforts in January of 1911 were to gain a better understanding of what exactly they were up against, sending “circulars to trade unions asking them to secure from their members information of conditions in the factories as to fire protection. She stated that there was a good deal of confusion in the administration of the fire laws on account of the

Building Department and Factory Department not being clear as to jurisdiction” (Reel 1 0671). It gives an eerie feeling, reading that they were talking to various authorities, trying to understand the available “fire appliances” like buckets, hoses, and alarms, and who has and should have jurisdiction over their installation, commenting that “there are 11,000 factories in New York, only one hundred fireproof. We might try to secure some means of egress at each window in addition to fire escapes” (Reel 1 0687), knowing that within two months of this meeting, one hundred forty-six lives would be lost in a factory fire where there were inadequate fire escapes.

The very month that the Triangle fire occurred, the League record comments on their turn towards legislation, stating that:

In the past the League has concentrated its effort upon direct organization work; but gradually it has become evident that the courts and legislature were instruments which though apparently unrelated or indirectly related to organization have a very important influence upon the efforts to organize.

It was a recognition of the possibility of using this influence as a helpful rather than a restricting and hampering one as it had been in the past that actuated the League in adding the Legislative Committee to its number of standing committees. (Reel 1 0722)

The report goes on to discuss that they were motivated to look into fire safety after the Newark fire, but hadn't introduced any new legislation yet, as they “hope to co-operate with the Fire Department with its effort to emend the charter in order to impose the responsibility for fire protection in one Department i.e. the fire department and also to demand certain definite requirements on the part of owners or tenants” (Reel 1 0722-0723).

After the Triangle fire, League members are initially taken up by cooperating with the union for relief work, helping with the funeral, and collecting “evidence for responsibility of fire” (Reel 1 0730). They also worked to form committees that could investigate reports of fire conditions and visited victims in the hospital (Reel 1 0730). In a rare moment of cooperation the League took no issue with:

Miss Dutcher reported: That she had been acting as agent for the Joint Relief Committee of the Fire Disaster and that she had been requested by this committee to write an article showing the serious effects and the heavy financial responsibility which was being carried by working women. She reported that the Committee had collected in all fifteen thousand dollars and that most of this had been distributed; that Miss Dutcher, Morris Hillquit and Abe Baroff were appointed trustees to distribute the funds for some of the relatives of the fire victims who were too young or otherwise unable to handle their financial affairs. She said that the Joint Relief Committee had worked in connection with the Red Cross. (Reel 1 0742)

After the initial flurry of activity surrounding the fire, the League developed a definite plan of action in May of 1911:

1. That a meeting of all the delegates of labor organizations in Greater New York be called for the purpose of introduction in Building and Fire laws, to learn what can be done at once, in ways of enforcement.
2. That every trade appoint members to inspect factories and make immediate demands with the threat of a ‘quit’ in case of failure to comply with these demands at the expiration of the appointed time.

3. That, as a favor to the W.T.U.L. since it has all the complaints at hand, and is making a special effort to get fire drills into as many factories as possible, the Unions be asked to report to the W.T.U.L. whether they succeed in getting fire drills or any change of conditions.
4. That the fire-drills be made a part of the proposed law and that the Unions demand Fire Drills immediately as well.
5. That another feature of the law be compulsory posting of fire protective requirements in factories.
6. That the Unions put into the hands of workers, posters, telling what the fire-law is, and what to do in case of fire.
7. That we ask the papers, especially the Labor papers - to insert as often as possible, 'What to Do In Case of Fire' and urge the workers to search at once for fire escapes, exits to roofs, etc. This committee agrees to get from the Fire Department, a very concise statement to send to the papers for this purpose. (Reel 1 0756)

Evidence that they acted on these plans can be seen in the minutes of their August 5, 1912 meeting when we read that it was "moved by Miss Marot seconded by Miss Pratt that representatives of the League or of the Legislative Committee visit the shops reported unsafe and inform the girls on leaving shop the unsafe condition. Mrs. Sullivan and Miss Corscaden volunteered to take their turn" (Reel 1 1026).

The other major focus of the League's legislative cooperation during this time was on restricting the number of hours women could legally work. In April and again in June of 1911, we are told that the League sent several representatives to Albany to speak for the 54 Hour Bill,

which faced major opposition from various manufacturers, particularly canners (Reel 1 0728-0729, 0790). When that bill inevitably failed, they made plans for the following year “that the Legislative Committee confine its work for this year to the enforcement rather than the introduction of new legislative measures, if however it proved possible to secure a committee who will give time to a 48 Hour bill and to carrying on an 8 Hour Day campaign that the latter be included in the program of the Committee. A motion was carried that the Legislative Committee co-operate with the New Jersey women if they introduced a 48 Hour Bill this year” (Reel 1 0852). This focus on hours legislation led to a somewhat surprising form of preemptive cooperation on the League’s part. While investigating a request for help organizing several factories in Utica, NY, two League representatives visited a mill and gave the following account of their visit:

The Superintendent showed us through and did not, of course, know who we were. When we left we asked him about the hours. He said ‘People of New York have not treated us fair, the manufacturers cannot stand the reduction to 54 hours.’ He said the hours a few years ago were 60, they were reduced to 58 and manufacturers bore the loss, they were reduced to 56 and the workers were still spared and the manufacturers again bore the loss, and they are now reduced to 54 and it is the workers turn. ‘You mean,’ I said, ‘that you will have to cut the wages’. ‘What else can we do’, he answered. I said ‘that is what happened in Massachusetts. Do you anticipate the same results?’ He lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders and said ‘How can we tell? That is up to the workers.’ (Reel 1 1034)

Fearing that there might be a backlash from employers leading to a massive strike like the one referenced in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the League wondered what they ought to do. We find that their first plan, hatched by Helen Marot, was to hold a series of meetings in conjunction with the Central Bodies in Utica at which Keir Hardie, a prominent Labor leader in the United Kingdom, would speak. In September of 1912, they intended to have Mary Dreier “see the men in Utica while in that neighborhood within the next few days and ask them if they would help arrange such meetings, if they would the League would be prepared to bear part of the expenses. The Secretary was instructed to arrange with the Campaign manager of the Socialist Party for Keir Hardie’s time” (Reel 1 1037-1038).

That next week, “Miss Dreier reported that she had in accordance with the request of the Executive Board seen representatives of the trade unions in Utica and found them to be in favor of the proposition that a meeting be arranged for Kier Hardie, before the introduction of the 54 Hour Law, for the mill workers in the Utica district. They wanted the League to arrange for such a meeting even if Kier Hardie could not speak and if Kier Hardie was the speaker they wanted a woman speaker also” (Reel 1 1039). With such encouragement, the League proceeded with their plans. That same night, however, they also “took a recess to look at pictures given by the Liberty Lantern Service” and were encouraged to think about whether or not an illustrated lecture, the powerpoint presentation of its day, would be useful for pushing organization throughout the state (Reel 1 1043-1044). Now, earlier that year, the League had considered the possibility of mounting a statewide campaign for organization, but had abandoned the idea temporarily when it came time for staff members to take their summer vacations (Reel 0947, 0974). Knowing that the state’s workers might soon feel the anger of their employers over legislation the League was

working so hard to have passed, the League pushed ahead with their statewide campaign and illustrated lectures, providing an interesting picture of the justifications and equivocations they went through in order to convince themselves that these activities were in keeping with their typical posture of cooperation with the labor movement:

It was decided in case dates could not be arranged for Kier Hardie, that the League would give instead an illustrated lecture showing the importance of organization. Before waiting to get an answer in regard to Hardie's lecture and taking up the lecture to be given by the League all plans for the lecture were sent to Mr. A. Rosenthal, Secretary Trades Assembly, Utica. New York and also sent word that Keir Hardie could not arrange his dates to speak in Central New York before October 1st. We have had no response to our communications and felt that it was unwise to push the lecture unless we could secure the co-operation of the trade union people, as the purpose of the lecture was not only to arouse interest but to leave in each place a Committee or group to whom unorganized workers could apply for assistance. With the assistance of Miss Pike I arranged a lecture to be given throughout the State and asked Miss Scott to present the scheme to the delegates to the N.Y. State Federation Convention. This lecture should have been referred first to the Educational Bureau, but the necessity to arrange a lecture immediately for Utica made it impossible to delay until Mrs Elliot's return.

We see here nods toward their usual attempts to secure the approval of labor bodies and to cooperate along established lines leading to the accomplishment of the League's declared goals, but we also see these measures being pushed aside as the League is swept up in the pressure and excitement of the moment. Ultimately, the League only gave the lecture a handful of recorded

times before it faded out of their records after November of 1912 (Reel 1 1092) and the League returned to their more typical activities of providing speakers and working for protective legislation. Nevertheless, their decision to pursue these lectures based on their own judgment of what would be most effective, with appeals to unions seeming more like afterthoughts, made clear to members hearing about the lectures that the League was gaining more confidence in themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the labor movement.

The Turn to Legislation: 1913-1919

Worthy Partners

In this last time period I will examine, the League's image of itself continued to shift away from the subservient helpmeet of the labor movement who listens and responds according to their wishes and towards a more proactive reform group focused more on gender rather than class. Much of that aspect will be addressed in the chapter on sisterhood, but here I will look at how the League framed its actions more and more in terms of their own expertise, both through their refusals of assistance and through those areas where they cooperated most frequently and willingly, and I will also look at their change in emphasis in regard to their educational programs and their role as a liaison with outside groups.

The League continued to offer help to striking workers, but the way they discussed that help changed in several fundamental ways, distancing themselves from certain strikes, or at least aspects of them, and complaining more openly about others. For example, in January of 1913:

A delegate from the Waist Makers Union was given the floor and asked the League to cooperate with them in their coming strike. Mrs Levine, a member of the United Garment Workers was given the floor. She stated that the United Garment Workers were on strike

in New York City and that she and Miss Blank were the only two members working for them, they wanted more help from the League. Mrs Levine later acknowledged that they were not working as members of the League but she as a member and organizer of the United Garment Workers of America and Miss Blank as a representative of the United Hebrew Trades. Mrs Levine said that to her it seemed most unwise for the White Goods Workers to come out when so many of their members were out and asked that the League use its influence to prevent the strike. It was explained to Mrs Levine that the League could not undertake such a step. It was also explained why the League could not answer Mrs Levine's request to help in the Garment Workers strike. (Reel 2 0007-0008)

In this account, the League clearly wishes to maintain distance, making clear that these members were not acting as representatives of the League, and that they would neither support nor try to prevent the strike, attempting to wash their hands of all responsibility for it. When the League ended up participating in the White Goods Workers' strike that same month, their description of it is essentially a long list of how the international union thwarted their every effort to be of service:

Miss Schneiderman reported that the Strike Committee composed of the Union members and herself worked out in co-operation with the members of the League before the strike was called. That the League had promised to take charge of the halls the first morning of the strike and had been on hand at seven in the morning. The League had also promised to help in the Publicity work and also furnish entertainment for the strikers. . . The second day of the strike the International union had taken this work out of the hands of the League members almost entirely. Mrs. Elliot who was to arrange for speakers in the

various halls was allowed to do something on the entertainment, but as the days progressed she was constantly interfered with. . . The Publicity Committee of the International was getting nothing about the White Goods Workers in the papers and our Committee undertook to interest the newspapers in special stories of the workers, this Mrs Weyl who had charge of the work was very successful in doing. . . The lawyers who had volunteered to help in the strike had been refused by the International and they had put in a politician lawyer who would save fines. . . This lawyer had refused to take up any aggressions of the thugs and police. . . A Parade was being arranged by the League for the White Goods Workers for Monday. Miss Schneiderman asked that the League send out a letter to its members requesting financial assistance. After much discussion; A motion was carried that the League should not at the present time send out a letter to its members for contributions to the White Goods Workers strike. Carried. (Reel 2 0011-0012)

This is hardly a glowing report encouraging affiliation with an international body and incorporation into the wider labor movement, but it does highlight the League's competence and their refusal to lend financial support only after "much discussion," which one imagines based on the preceding list contained a consideration of just how likely these bungling leaders were to misuse any funds the League might forward to them without gaining any material benefit for the women involved. This interaction with the strike also motivated the League to think more about the effects on their members and the strength of their own coalition, with Helen Marot opining in her February report that:

It is not only the League members who willingly sacrifice themselves for the sake of the strikers, but the League itself is sacrificed. We come through each of these strikes with a

weaker rather than a stronger membership. The members themselves are getting a valuable education but it is harder and harder all the time to secure their co-operation as League members. There are a few members of the League who in spite of the want of policy, in spite of the inconsiderate treatment stand by the League, whether or not, but we are unnecessarily weakening the members who do not understand the situation. (Reel 2 0031-0032)

Unquestioning cooperation with the labor movement is here described as a very real threat to the internal cohesion and even continued existence of the League.

One of the more upbeat accounts of the League's strike efforts during this time was in regard to the Bag Makers recorded in January of 1914:

As was reported at our last meeting the Bag Makers were on strike and had come to the League for help. About 75 women and 20 men came out on strike against a 35 per cent reduction. They appealed to the Central Labour Union for help and were referred to the League. . . after them being on strike for about a week their places were being filled by strike breakers, so we tried to arrange a conference with the manufacturers through Mr Melish and was successful in having a Committee from each department of the strikers meet with Mr Melish and myself. The first conference we were able to have the fining system abolished, the girls to be given time to wash up before the lights were turned out after quitting time, the dressing rooms opened on time so that the girls could get back again in the time allotted for lunch; the willingness of the employers to meet a Committee from the employees; the only thing we could not agree upon was the number to be taken back the employer agreeing to take all back as help was required. We were not satisfied

with that and asked for another meeting next day at which the employer promised to have the majority of them back by the first of the year and was very candid in telling them that for two weeks he was paying the strike breakers extra money and that he expected when they ceased to do that they would leave him and as they did that there would [be] room for the old people. We discussed the whole situation and felt that it was the best we could do for an unorganized group, in an unskilled trade. (Reel 2 0190-0191)

Considering the modest gains that must be characterized as a win, it is no wonder that the League appears somewhat disillusioned with strikes by this time, though, again, this account portrays the League as a competent liaison who was willing to help women workers when the CLU was not, suggesting to members that the League is a valuable ally to women workers.

The most frequent participation of the League in strikes was the provision of volunteer pickets. The records that the League kept of these efforts worked to show that these pickets were more than mere “mink brigades” discouraging police brutality by exploiting their class privilege, but rather offered vital instruction on the legal rights of peaceful picketers. For instance, when the League helped a group of Brooklyn United Garment Workers, “who were having a great deal of trouble with the police” (Reel 2 0270) in July of 1914, “Miss Svenson and Miss Schepps went over and helped the girls picket, and incidentally told the policemen over there who were interfering with the pickets their duty, which proved very effectual” (Reel 2 0272-0273).

Similarly, when the Umbrella Workers went on strike on October 20, 1914, they sent a representative to the League who “especially requested that the League help in stopping the Police interference with the pickets” (Reel 2 0298-0299) as the “girls” were being arrested (Reel 2 0303). That same month, the League also made use of street meetings to aid Tailors Union

Local 38, “with the result that the men have been allowed to picket and wear the signs calling the attention of the passers by to the strike” (Reel 2 0304). Again, in February of 1915, “three members of the Ladies Waist & Dressmakers Union who had been on strike for six months at the factory of K.I. Litwin 145 West 30th asked that the League help them in picketing as they were being arrested and fined. There are about 35 strike breakers in the shop and the girls were doing picket duty morning and night. Moved and seconded that the League co-operate with the Union in helping in the picketing” (Reel 2 0344). The League views this work as educational, stating in regard to the Bag Makers in July of 1915 that “The League was the first to start the girls and teach them how to picket” as well as sacrificial, adding that “Miss Whitehead was willing and did get arrested to prove that we had a right to do peaceful picketing in New Jersey” (Reel 2 0402-0403). Indeed, in the face of so many failed strikes, the League began to measure their success more in terms of their ability to minimize police interference and establish the right to picketing more than actually winning the demands of the workers (Reel 2 0417). They continued to record frequent acts of willing help on picket lines until June of 1918, when for the first time they showed serious reservations about doing so, although even here they don’t refuse outright:

We have been asked by Mr. Berger whether we would not take charge of the picketing, and I told him that I was sorry not to be able to comply with his request, because neither Mrs Swartz or I could undertake the job, and we knew of no one else who would do so. Personally, I feel that it would be a mistake for the League to take hold of that end of the strike, as it has many serious sides to it, and might work harm to the League. I promised, however, that if we could not be helpful in any other way, we would be glad to do so. (Reel 2 0636)

The phrase “might work harm to the League” is worth noting as it demonstrates members’ concern that they be able to maintain the coalition they have built, possibly at the cost of refusing help to a union in need. This passage also makes clear the League’s continued movement away from trade union tactics and towards other methods of ameliorating the special problems of working women.

Generally, during this time however, the League continued to furnish speakers and continued to both answer outside calls for their cooperation organizing women workers, always emphasizing the need for them to take on leadership roles within the unions they formed. Even as they took on a more assertive stance, they felt compelled to mention that someone had asked them to intervene in a given situation, even when that someone is a manufacturer offended at the unfair advantage male workers had because they could underbid women who were no longer allowed to work at night (Reel 2 0477) or a woman from the YWCA who was horrified by the conditions in laundries (Reel 2 0531-0532). They continued to take pride in what they had to offer to a striking union, singing the praises of members who could render invaluable services like “giving Italian speeches, and by interpreting a lot of the things that were going on at the meetings” as well as enrolling new members (Reel 2 0617), even as they became increasingly hesitant to engage in a tactic that they found ineffective for making lasting changes in the lives of working women.

Financial Cooperation

At the beginning of this time of turning to legislation, the League still continued to offer financial support in the areas they traditionally had, handing out \$1000.00 to the White Goods Workers’ strike in February of 1913 (Reel 2 0023) and to the Straw and Panama Hatters’ strike in

March of 1913 (Reel 2 0040), and also making a public appeal for funds for the former (Reel 2 0031). Similarly, when the Box Makers were on strike in November of 1914 and “24 girls arrested and fined \$10.00 each” the League “had raised \$100.00 to help pay fines” (Reel 2 0312-0313). By the end of this period, the League was still giving out \$1000.00 contributions to strikes in trades they were actively trying to organize, in this case the laundry workers (Reel 22 0072) and campaigning to raise funds for their daily operations through teas and luncheons for allies and appeals for pledges from affiliated unions (Reel 22 0073-0074). The biggest story to note revolved around a major breakdown in their image of cooperation through finances and their attempts to recover it.

The Retail Clerks Committee, chaired by Elizabeth Dutcher, announced in February of 1913 that they:

had on hand \$210.00 and they had reached a time when they felt they should employ an organizer who would work under Miss Scott. They had as a matter of fact engaged Miss Helen Schloss for the Retail Clerks Committee and the Committee requested that the League bear half the expenses of the salary which would amount to \$35.00. After much discussion as to the desirability of the organizer engaged a motion was carried that the League endorse the action of the Retail Clerks' Committee in engaging Miss Schloss for one month and that the League pay half the salary amounting to \$35.00. (Reel 2 0027)

At this point, the League agreed to cooperate in this financial endeavor, albeit with some hesitation since they had not been consulted regarding who would be hired. The following month, the committee reported reasonable progress with 22 girls enrolled in membership and another 140 visited and listed as potential members, so the League agreed to pay half their

organizer's salary for another month (Reel 2 0043), though they also questioned Dutcher about behavior in a strike of which the League did not approve (Reel 2 0046). In April of 1913, we are told that a union has been officially started among the Retail Clerks, with officers elected and a charter signed, but they were already at odds with their national organization because they did not want "the benefit feature" (read they wanted to have lower dues and initiation fees) (Reel 2 0058). Helen Marot also took issue with Elizabeth Dutcher at this meeting because she had spoken publicly about the organization of the Retail Clerks after she herself had suggested to the League that they ought to pursue a course of secrecy, which they had approved as the appropriate policy for the committee (Reel 2 0058).

Despite these differences with Dutcher, or perhaps precisely because of them, the League decided to send her to Buffalo to investigate a group of retail clerks who were striking and "picketing like other workers" so that she could "learn the methods used by the strikers and do what she can to help" (Reel 2 0065-0066). The only thing she appeared to absorb from her trip was the fact that the "Buffalo girls were paying 75 cents initiation fee and 25 cents a month dues" while her retail clerks were being told they must pay \$1.00 initiation fee or "there would be great insubordination all over the country" (Reel 2 0068). The ensuing discussion illustrates the growing rift between Dutcher's committee and the rest of the League:

Miss Dutcher said that the Brooklyn Consumers' League was interested in the problem of the Department Store Workers and had offered to pay \$25.00 a month \$100.00 in all towards Miss Schloss's salary if she would get them data on wages and hours of the girls working in the stores. Miss Dutcher asked that the League pay \$30.00 a month for four months beginning May to supplement Miss Schloss's salary.

Miss Scott stated that she had attended a meeting of the Retail Clerks' Committee where Miss Schloss had announced that she had been visiting the girls and asking them questions in regard to wages, - if they lived at home or boarded; how much salary; how many working in the house and who was supporting them. She felt this was not organization work and that there should be more trade unionists on the Committee.

Miss Schneiderman stated that she considered organization work organization work and investigation work investigation work.

Miss O'Reilly asked if the International Retail Clerks had been appealed to for financial aid and suggested that they might contribute towards the work in New York. . .

Moved that it is the sense of the Executive Board of the League that its Retail Clerks' Committee in accepting contributions for the work of organizing the Retail Clerks accept contributions only upon the understanding that they are to be used in getting information for the League and for organization according to the established policy of the League.

Carried. Moved that the Retail Clerks' Committee be given \$60.00 a month. Motion lost.

Moved that the Retail Clerks' Committee be given \$35.00 a month for four months.

Motion lost.

Moved that a special committee consisting of the President, two Vice-Presidents, General Organizer and Chairman of Finance Committee be given power to secure financial aid for the Retail Clerks Committee if possible. Motion Carried." (Reel 2 0068-0071)

Some explanation for why the League denied this financial cooperation came out in the minutes of a special meeting of the Retail Clerks' Committee that were specially included in the League's record. They state that "the Board was not in favor of allowing this and considered it a

dangerous precedent to establish; to permit outside non-labor organizations to employ workers jointly with the League” and it appears that the Consumers’ League was equally hesitant about entering into a financial partnership with the Committee if they couldn’t guarantee a full four months of work. Mary Dreier was present at their meeting to report on what the committee appointed to look into their finances had concluded, that they would abide by the ruling of the Executive Board and wait to hear from their appeal to the National Retail Clerks’ Association for funds before giving any further financial support. They would, however, “continue to help in its work as formerly” (Reel 2 0083-0085). Without financial cooperation, Dutcher felt that their partnership was at an end, though, and decided to turn in her resignation, attempting to get the rest of her committee to do likewise (they didn’t) and to turn the Retail Clerks’ Union against the League (Reel 2 0083-0091). Over the next five years, the League continued to cooperate with the union, repeatedly assuring them of their continued sympathy, but they never contributed significantly to them financially, and the last mention of them during this time period, in May of 1918, had a League representative washing her hands of them, stating that:

I am afraid that I have lost my pull with the men who are managing the Union, because of my criticism on the way in which they conduct the the business of the Union.

I feel that the way things stand to-day, very little progress will be made so long as these men are at the head. They have no experience themselves, and are not willing to take advice. In fact, they resent being shown their mistakes, and my recommendation would be that we leave the Retail Clerks alone for a while, and help them whenever they ask for our help. (Reel 2 0618)

It would appear that Dutcher may have been more correct than at first appeared to be true, as without financial cooperation, the League's ability to effectively cooperate with the retail clerks was hampered, though the frequent mentions of the union throughout the League's record continually insisted that the coalition remained intact, even in this last instance, when the door is left open to them whenever they should realize their mistakes, it would seem, and request the League's assistance once again.

Legislative and Political Cooperation

I turn, finally, to my last section under cooperation, that of the legislative and political work that the League undertook between 1913 and 1919. This discussion will be limited, as the League's efforts toward suffrage and some types of protective legislation will be covered in the chapter on sisterhood, but it is important for me to look at some of the coalition building they did in regard to educating workers about their legal rights, educating themselves about the political process so as to engage it more effectively, and working with other groups in order to pass and, more frequently, enforce legislation. They continued to focus on hours laws, though they wavered as to whether they ought to try for daily or weekly limits; explored the concept of a minimum wage, which brought out all of their rhetorical arsenal to combat the resulting factionalism and threats to the group's unity; and, of course, persevered in their fight for fire safety in factories.

I will just look at a few of the most telling examples. The first illustrates how their worthy-partner stance of waiting to be asked was impacted by the pressing need for fire safety. We read in October of 1913 that "Miss Schneiderman reported that synopsis of the law had been printed and were to be given out Saturday at the first street meeting and letters were to be sent to

the union in regard to the members of the Law Enforcement Committee visiting the Union to explain the laws” (Reel 2 0157), and then the follow-up report in November states that:

the Law Enforcement Committee had two meetings which were fully attended. At one of the meetings Mrs Frances Perkins Wilson gave a very interesting talk on the present fire laws. The digest of the factory laws is now in printed form. Two Street meetings were held where these circulars were given out and at both of the meetings we fell short, so eager were the people to have them. It was quite a satisfaction to find that not one of the circulars could be found on the side walk after the meeting was over. Even the policemen commended the work and thought that we ought to keep it up. Letters were sent out to 24 unions telling them of the labor laws and offering speakers to explain the laws. So far we have had one reply from Bookbinders 43 asking Miss Dreier to speak on the laws. (Reel 2 0165)

On the one hand, the League didn't barge into the middle of various union meetings demanding that the assembled members listen to their speakers, instead waiting to see if they would welcome further instruction, but in printing pamphlets and getting up street meetings, and preparing lectures should they be welcome, the League is definitely taking a good deal of preemptive action, declaring to their members that the League is an authority on what is best for protecting workers through the law, pointing once more to their status as worthy partners.

The second example I will look at shows an interesting relationship between the League's policy interests and those of the labor movement. In October of 1914 we see the following report in regard to minimum wage:

Mollie Schepps reported that she had been instructed at the last League meeting to ask what the position of the Delegates to the Central Labor Union was on the question of 'The Minimum Wage'. She had carried out the instructions and found that the delegates were not able to answer the question, but a Committee had been appointed to arrange for an Open Meeting of the Central Labor Union at which Mr. Robert G. Valentine and Mr Hugh Frayne will discuss the matter of 'The Minimum Wage. All members of the League invited to attend the meeting. The report was accepted and the members urged to attend the meeting Sunday October 18th. at 4.P.M. (Reel 2 0289)

In this case, the League appears to be the catalyst for a major policy debate within the labor movement. Now, the League doesn't claim to be directing what position the Central Labor Union will take on the matter, but they are nudging the issue into the forefront of their consciousness. The matter of the minimum wage also demonstrated, again, the tenuous nature of the League's use of responsiveness as a major element of their cooperation. To illustrate, that same month:

With regard to other legislation it was the sense of the Committee that before activity on behalf of any other Bill was undertaken that the Committee should study the question of Minimum Wage Legislation, so that if the proposal of such legislation were approved by the League the Committee would be prepared to go before the Unions and speak intelligently on the proposal. In the meantime the Committee planned to attend the conference on the 'Minimum Wage' at the C.L.U., which is to be addressed by Mr. Hugh Frayne on behalf of labor and Mr. Valentine of the Massachusetts Wage Commission. It was also agreed informally that the technic (sic) of getting a bill through the Legislature

be studied and some practical lobbyist like Miss Perkins be asked to explain the procedure to the Committee. (Reel 2 0305)

We see here that the Legislative Committee of the League wants to be well-versed on the subject so they can win over the unions to their position (whenever they figure out what that is) even as they are claiming to defer to the information presented at the CLU meeting. The last sentence is also of interest because it is an early indication of the League's efforts to become more systematic in their legislative program, again in their effort to build up their image as an authority on the use of the law to protect workers' interests.

The final examples I want to examine deal with the League's attempts to portray themselves as centered between workers, particularly women, and the legislative forces that impact them. They accomplished this in several ways. One was by inviting the unions to use them as an agency for reporting factory safety violations, which they would then investigate and attempt to have addressed, as they did with the Children's Dressmakers' Union in December of 1915 (Reel 2 0452). Another was by both informing workers of their rights, and then helping them to secure them, as this report indicates regarding workers' compensation in May of 1918: "I spoke on Compensation for working women in Brooklyn, and so far we have given out about 6000 leaflets on the matter. I went to the Compensation Department on three different occasions to help a girl secure her compensation. The matter was finally adjusted satisfactorily. It is very worth while attending the hearings" (Reel 2 0623). Finally, as the League came into their own politically in October of 1918, they reported developing a system for connecting the women of the state with the information they needed on issues and candidates in order to make informed decisions at the polls:

Miss Dreier made a report as Chairman of the Legislative Committee, stating that we had formed a State Legislative Committee of trade union women or women closely identified with labor. We had sent our questionnaires to 700 candidates for office, and would acquaint as many people as we could reach with the results. (Reel 2 0653)

We then got up a leaflet called the 'Political Guide of the Women's Trade Union League', which we sent to as many organizations and people as we could reach. Also to the candidates in favor of our program. So far we have disposed of about 6000 of these leaflets. In all, we have 10,000 so that we will have to keep hustling to get rid of them by election day. (Reel 2 0657)

In this way, the League had clearly moved from a stance of submission to the dictates of the AFL and wider labor movement to a position of authority, from which they feel comfortable counseling thousands of people on how they ought to vote in order to support the interests of labor, as the League understands them, albeit with the input of "trade union women or women closely identified with labor."

Chapter 4: Solidarity

In addition to the acts of cooperation explored in the last chapter, the League also sought to build coalition through the rhetorical use of solidarity. In using this term, I intend to draw on the concept both of individuals brought together through common interests as well as the connotation of mutual support within a group. In this chapter, I will look at examples of when the League's records showed clear evidence of their attempts to manufacture closer ties, both ideological and emotional, among their members through their descriptions of both the League's internal interactions and those between their members and the groups with whom they worked. The focus here will be on the record of what we might call micro-actions, small gestures through words or finances, that act as reminders of who and what the League values, what their goals are, and what their ideal (though always changing) image of themselves looks like. While my main focus is on the rhetorical contribution to coalition building that their record of these micro-actions provide rather than the micro-actions themselves, I will consider some of their calls for member participation in answer to these reports under the same head. Again, some important gender-related examples of these micro-actions will be left until the sisterhood chapter, but I will look at those dealing with class and the pull of various "isms" other than feminism that tugged on the allegiances of League members in varying degrees, particularly Socialism, Progressivism, and trade unionism. This chapter is broken down into the same three time periods as the last one, and I will again explore three themes across those time frames: Solidarity as Affirmation, Solidarity as Affiliation, and Barriers to Solidarity. While I am using the term "affirmation," I will explore both instances where the League is condemning an action as well as endorsing it if doing so affirms their group identity. Similarly, under the term "affiliation" I will also consider

times when distancing themselves from another group helps to define who they are as an organization. The barriers I will explore, on the other hand, will be those times when the League was divided as to where their allegiances ought to lie, when they discussed obstacles they felt existed between themselves and other groups, or when no amount of rhetorical posturing on their part could bring someone in line with their ideology.

Early Organization: 1906-1909

Solidarity as Affirmation

During these early years, one of the most straightforward examples of coalition building in the record appears where the minutes report various compliments paid to the League by labor men. For example, on May 23, 1907, “Mr. Thornton announced that the Brooklyn Central Labor Union had declared that the success of the Brooklyn Labor Label Fair was due to the Women’s Trade Union League and to the Women’s Auxilliaries. He announced also that the fair had netted the Central Labor Union \$500” (Reel 1 0190). Similarly, on October 27, 1908, they report that “we understand that the president of the [Workingman’s State] Federation made quite a speech in regard to our league telling the convention that we do work which ought to have the support of all the trade union men in New York State” (Reel 1 0375). One of the more interesting examples of this came in the Secretary’s report of August 24, 1909, in which she states that “Mrs. Muller cooked us a little supper for the Labor Day Committee. . . The supper was delightful socially and everyone entered into conversation. There were three young men from the Laundry Workers present, one of them remarked to Miss Schneiderman, as he was leaving, that he would not be so bashful about accepting an invitation next time, that the supper reminded him of the little gatherings of the comrades in Russia” (Reel 1 0490). All three compliments emphasize the

League's connection to the wider labor movement while making the League seem like an organization members can be proud to belong to.

Additionally, the minutes often record the League's positive assessments of themselves, such as when on February 27, 1908, they laud Annie C. Patterson's resignation as chairman of their Auxiliary Committee, which "was accepted with great regret, but with appreciation of her reason and belief that the move to place the whole responsibility of the Auxiliary work within the ranks of organized labor was a gain" (Reel 1 0304), which shows them living up to their ideals of not allowing the middle- and upper-class allies to dominate their work. They also applauded their efforts at reaching working women through social events, noting in June of 1909 that "the Dressmakers had held a party at the [League] house and nearly 200 people had attended, that strawberries had been served and there was dancing and music and Miss Marot spoke to the girls on organization. Nine girls joined at the end of the evening" (Reel 1 0464) and that same year that "on July 10th, our first picnic took place. We gave a camera party to the Textile Workers. Sister Casey and I attended the picnic. There were only fourteen girls, but they seemed to have a good time and we're considering others" (Reel 1 0480). Indeed, the Secretary went on that "there is no question in my mind that the scheme of picnics is very well worth while. It puts the League in close touch with the Union girls and they meet us simply as a member of the party and not as some outside organization. I hope that we will continue this and make a point of having as many as possible through the next month" (Reel 1 0481). Through these compliments, the records encouraged League members to think positively about the endeavors of their organization and also to see, and hopefully endorse, the ideological motivations behind them.

Beyond these social engagements, the League also spoke positively in their 1907-1908 Annual Report of the improved receptiveness to their goals in the wider public leading to not only more members, but more active ones:

There is a recent and increased sense of social unity among wage earners, and an unusual number, who are not wage earners, are turning from palliative measures for social relief to programmes which aim at a higher standard of living for wage earners and a democratic control of industry. This movement has redounded directly to the benefit of the League. The membership, which is now 255, has not only increased but the activity of the members has more than doubled. (Reel 22 0004)

As this quote hints, the League, in addition to patting their own backs, often encouraged feelings of solidarity by singing the praises of groups or individuals with whom they wished to ally themselves. For example, on February 28, 1907, the record states that “it is of interest and I hope indicative that the Consumers’ League which has heretofore depended on legislation and the opinion of the leisure class to change conditions for women workers is now appealing to women in organization to influence the legislation which relates to them” (Reel 1 0161). This endorsement praises in another group the methods the League is trying to implement themselves.

One frequent method of showing their approval of a group’s actions and affirming their common ideological ground with them during this period was to throw them a party. The 1907-1908 Annual Report states that “the League gave a party for this local [Bookbinders’ Local 43] in September to help interest the new women who joined the local as a result of the new contracts” (Reel 22 0005). On June 1, 1908, we read that “the League gave a May Day Dance to the East Side Women Unionists. . . It was a very hot night and therefore not quite as many were

present as was expected, nevertheless it was a very great occasion and the hall was quite full. . . . Speeches were made At the end Labor in the person of Sister Schneiderman was crowned Queen of the May and a resolution was unanimously adopted to stand by each other through organized labor” (Reel 1 0336). Similarly, we see in January of 1909 that the League was planning “to give the dressmakers in acknowledgment of their affiliation with the International organization, a Valentine’s dance on February 13th” (Reel 1 0403-0404) and in March of 1909 that “the white goods workers had affiliated with the National Organization, and that a party had been given in honor of the event” (Reel 1 0429). The dual purpose of these social events was emphasized again in the Annual Report of 1908-1909, where they state specifically of the dressmakers’ dance that “the dance served two purposes: The members of the union recognized more fully than they had before their connection with the labor movement; it offered an opportunity of reaching non-union dressmakers” (Reel 22 0027).

In addition to these social affirmations, the League also employed letter and resolution writing during this time to either affirm their support for some measure or to oppose it, in the process building up their sense of solidarity with one another. To illustrate, in 1907 we see two examples of the League opposing political action through writing. First, in March, the record states that “the League secured the co-operation of the working women in opposing the Prentice Bill. We circulated printed material issued by the Consumer’s League explaining the bill and asking the working women who were opposed to the passage of the bill to write to members of the legislation committee” (Reel 1 0170). In this case we see the League reinforcing their coalition both with the Consumers’ League and with working women. In June, we find a less comprehensive, but nevertheless group effort to express their dissatisfaction:

The Secretary reported that Mr. Oscar Straus the Commissioner of Labor had handed down the decision that the importation from abroad of Lithographers was not in violation of the law covering contracts for alien labor.⁴

The President was instructed to appoint a committee to draw up resolutions condemning the action of the Department of labor. Send a copy to the Department of Labor, President of the United States and the newspapers. (Reel 1 0204)

Similarly, in March of 1909 we see the same type of tactic used to support another political measure when we read that “The President also sent out during the month a letter to the members of the League requesting them to urge the passage of the Unemployed Bill by writing to the members of the Legislature” (Reel 1 0428).

Solidarity as Affiliation

Another way that the League demonstrated and encouraged solidarity was through their various associations. To begin, they discussed their efforts to foster a sense of connection with the League among certain members. The Secretary reports on February 28, 1907 that:

I took up the matter this month in a systematic way of connecting the members of the League with this work. . . I have carefully considered all of our 200 members and listed those whom I thought the Finance Committee might send letters of appeal for \$5. or \$10. annual contribution. . . I at the same time listed those from whom I think there might be some chance of securing active work. In reply to those letters I have had personal interviews and some replies by letter. What more we may do in the future in this line I

⁴For a detailed explanation of labor’s complex relationship with immigration and the laws governing it, such as those forbidding immigrants who are recruited by and brought to the US under contract to an employer as referred to in this example, see A.T. Lane’s *Solidarity or Survival? American Labor and European Immigrants, 1830-1924*.

cannot say, but I feel we have at least given all the members a chance to help if they care to. (Reel 1 0162)

In this case, they are hoping to foster connection through relatively small donations and opportunities for “active work,” perhaps serving on a committee or passing out circulars in regard to the work of the Label Committee, but they also tried to make more members feel connected by sending out explanations of the League’s work or situations they were involved in so that they would have a better understanding of just what they were contributing to. An example of this can be found in the Secretary’s report for October 24, 1907 where she states that:

In accordance with instructions Miss Dreier and I compiled a statement setting forth the reasons for the Telegrapher’s Strike, and appealed to our members for financial assistance. These letters were mailed to all our members and up to date we have received in return \$62.75 of which \$42.75 has been forwarded to them and received with very warm appreciation. Should like to add also that our members have appreciated receiving the statement as most of them were very hazy in regard to the situation. We have received many congratulations on having issued it. (Reel 1 0249-0250)

These attempts to include more members in the work of the League reinforced the idea that it was bigger than just the paid staff and that being a member could carry significance for women’s lives beyond just signing an occasional check.

Of course, because the League was trying to enter the labor movement from the outside, they also went out of their way to build up their affiliations with unions and Central Bodies, emphasizing their common goals and shared interests. For instance, they report on November 26, 1907 that “The White Goods Workers in New York are anxious to have our League attend their

Executive Board meetings and advise them in regard to organization. I attended one of the meetings of the local and am pleased to report that they are at last carrying on their business themselves. Up to a recent date they had a representative of the Hebrew Trades presiding at their meetings, now they have one of their own girls, whom they have elected president” (Reel 1 0270-0271). Here we see both that the League is highlighting the fact that this union has called them in to offer guidance, which speaks to the worthy-partner trope discussed in the last chapter, and also that the union has come into line with the League’s values, taking control of their own organization, even as they call in outside help from the League. On July 28, 1908, furthermore, we read that “Miss Schneiderman reported that in the near future the Cap Makers will ask to be affiliated with the league, because they believe the way to build up their union is to encourage the union spirit everywhere” (Reel 1 0349), indicating that joining with the League is, in fact, promoting the growth of the labor movement. Similarly, on May 3, 1909, we find that “Miss Casey reported on the work that was being done with the Textile Workers. She reported that the female textile workers were organized and that there are about eighty in the union. She laid special emphasis on the need there was for each organization affiliating with all the other organizations in a common effort” (Reel 1 0452). In this case, while Miss Casey doesn’t specifically reference the League in this effort, it is certainly implied that in participating in the League’s work, members would be contributing to bringing various groups together in that common effort.

Of course, these affiliations didn’t always go smoothly, especially considering the great variety of groups with which the League worked. To illustrate, in February of 1906, we are told that a League representative has been speaking at a gathering of White Goods workers,

endeavoring to show them the advantages of adopting the union label, when she states that, “in the middle of my speech I was requested not to recommend their affiliation with the American Federation of Labor that the time had not come, those in charge of the meeting thought to take up the question of affiliation. I saw some of the girls after the meeting and left the League cards with them, and asked them to come to us if they felt we could help them in any way” (Reel 1 0161). The League, having been formed at an AFL convention and claiming their organization practices as their own were put in an awkward position by this request that they not push for the White Goods workers to affiliate with them, but rather than walk away from the group until they were willing to do so, the League representative chose to encourage their continued relationship, presumably in the hope that they will eventually be brought to a place of solidarity. On another occasion, we find the League commenting on the need to continue a problematic relationship with the Brooklyn Central Labor Union, though this time it seems more as a policing effort. Helen Marot reported on March 23, 1909 that she had attended one of the BCLU’s meetings as a representative from her union, “and had realized even more than at any previous time the importance of the Leagues’ having representatives in the Central bodies” (Reel 1 0432-0433).

The League also recorded their involvements with groups outside of the labor movement. For example, we find in May of 1907 that the American Academy of Medicine was inviting the League to send a delegate to their three-day discussion of “Medical Sociology.” While the League appeared pleased enough by this invitation to accept it, they did not feel obligated to meet them on their terms: “the secretary announced that the secretary of the American Academy of Medicine had specially requested that Mrs. Blatch be appointed delegate, and that she had filled out a card for Mrs. Blatch. Mrs. Blatch announced that it would be impossible for her to

attend and suggested that Mr. Martin be appointed delegate in her place. Her suggestion was unanimously carried” (Reel 1 0191). The League made use of their access to affluent members like Mrs. Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in order to further their plans during this time period, noting for instance, in relation to a planned pageant in November of 1907, that they would print “at the head of the circular an advisory committee which would assure the public that the pageant would be carried out on artistic lines and was endorsed by people of financial standing” (Reel 1 0268). Despite this tendency to name-drop, however, the League also pushed back against the reform groups with which they worked, with one member claiming in February of 1908 that “I have accepted invitations to conferences on unemployment, and have accepted two committee appointments as I find I am able to dissuade the philanthropic people from starting up schemes to give regular work at low wages and thus decrease the out put later on at fair wages” (Reel 1 0306), and another stating in March of that same year that she “pushed on the Social Ethical League the subject of unemployment for their next meeting believing that it would be a test whether the conservative element of the league was willing to handle the subject radically” (Reel 1 0314).

Barriers to Solidarity

Nevertheless, there were times when the League had more significant struggles to establish solidarity with other groups, in turn undermining the cohesiveness of the League itself. Sometimes the trouble was a simple matter of a difference in language, as suggested by the somewhat humorous December 1906 report of the Cooks Committee that states, “Miss Day reported that the cooks were now meeting regularly that there were four or five members who attended faithfully, but that it was most difficult to talk to them on account of their not

understanding English” (Reel 1 0140). In this instance we see evidence of the League’s early, fumbling attempts to reach out to working women without always having people with the right skills to do it well. When we look at how they attempted to reach out to Italian women workers, however, we see them discussing what they saw as more profound cultural barriers to their winning these women over to the tenets of trade unionism. For instance, in November of 1907, they seek out help from prominent Italians whom they believe can show them “how best to approach the girls and avoid their prejudices, and conform as nearly as possible to their ideas. It seems as though it might be valuable for the League to do such special work with the Italian girls” (Reel 1 0272). Again, the following month we see that “Miss Bennett has been working out plans looking towards the organization of Italian girls, during the month; she has talked, probably to the most important Italians, who are interested and could be helpful on the subject. They all agreed that special methods must be adopted for handling the Italians to be successful in organization. For the purpose of formulating plans for organization we propose to call together a committee” (Reel 1 0282-0283). Even the next year, in November of 1908, we continue to see the League using this same kind of language, discussing the eagerness of a “young Italian girl a Miss Briganti,” who wants to do work for them and who has led the League to believe that “to get the Italian girls we have to use special methods . . . She impressed me with the fact of how terribly guarded the Italian girls were and the only hope of our doing effective work is through an Italian woman” (Reel 1 0388-0389). While the evident belief in Italian stereotypes revealed in these passages is a bit concerning, this is evidence that the League is consciously thinking about appealing to people ideologically, and that they are willing to seek partial connections to get

things done, yes hoping that they can win them over more completely later, but compromising to get their foot in the door.

This willingness to work at overcoming the differences among the working women they served is given further impetus when they note in September of 1909 that:

During the past two weeks we have had three reports from different trades indicating a concerted action among manufacturers to stir up race antagonism between the Jewish and Italian girls for the purpose of retaining the cheaper labor of the Italians. This problem is eminent, and it seems to me the most pressing one we have before us in helping us deal with women workers in New York City. The necessity of having someone who speaks Italian and who can understand the Italian women as an active worker in our League is now more needed than ever. I think we ought to get a woman who thoroughly understands the Trade Unions, she must give the doctrine as well as practical advice. (Reel 1 0502)

Indeed, we can see in their 1908-1909 Annual Report that they are quite cognizant of the difficulties facing those seeking solidarity among working women, but they also claim confidence that they can teach methods that will overcome these barriers. To illustrate:

The Jewish women are quick to organize, and the league has found in several trades that the membership of unions was wholly Jewish, while the other nationalities working in the same trade were non-union. There is never, in these unions, any attempt to exclude other nationalities, but difference in language, custom, locality of residence have all worked against a solid union membership irrespective of nationality. The league's East Side organizer is working among the Jewish women for the purpose of making effective their

trade union efforts and bringing them as fast as possible to the adoption of methods which will induce women of one trade and of all nationalities to join together. (Reel 22 0027-0028)

In addition to these language- and culture-based barriers to solidarity, the League also had to deal with internal conflicts. Some conflicts arose because of the difficulty involved in getting members to engage in active work. As Secretary Helen Marot laments at length in her February 28, 1907 report:

The League has undertaken perhaps the most difficult task in the program of any effort in behalf of labor. It involves not only all the difficulties surrounding the organization of workers in trades, but it adds to that the task of changing the point of view of a certain class of workers from personal to a social one. The League has gone on the assumption that any one and every one can do the work. I believe this is not true and I believe it is not only unwillingness to do the heavy work we ask of them, but also a feeling of incompetence on their part for trade union work. I believe that the hard work of visiting union girls and speaking at union meetings etc, presupposes a large faith and enthusiasm for the subject. I think we are expecting more of our members than any other organization gets. I think also that the work we ask of them is exacting and special. (Reel 1 0162-0163)

The result of the League asking volunteer workers to do such difficult work, she goes on to say, is that “the brunt of the work with a few notable exceptions has fallen on the office and it is for this reason that the office gets into a state of mind which makes it difficult not to look after all the details of the work earlier so that little time is left or little force to develop the League as an

organization” (Reel 1 0163). Her solution is to hire more paid workers who could do the most difficult work, reporting to the committees, however, so as to “gradually work up committees to the point where they would do more work than they have up to the present” (Reel 1 0164). This conflict between paid workers and volunteer workers played out frequently among League members, though as we see here, it was not a strictly class divide, but one of commitment, between those who were all in for the League and those who weren’t willing to give to the point of sacrifice. It is also apparent here, however, that Marot, at least, and likely others were aware that they would probably never get the same level of intense enthusiasm for the cause out of all of their members, so they instead sought ways to compensate for this lack of solidarity by coming up with arrangements that would allow less-involved members to contribute what they were willing and able to give without exasperating the full-time workers.

Additionally, the records show several instances where League members disagreed with one another. The language used in the minutes tended to downplay the intensity of those conflicts, with short references like the January 23, 1908 comment that “Miss Daley differed with her, as to the reason” (Reel 1 0291), but sometimes there are hints that things did get a bit more heated. Twice, these discussions surrounded plays. In June of 1908, we see that “A discussion took place in regard to having a play as a part of the program for the convention. Miss Schneiderman approved of the plan, Miss Edelson disapproved. A motion was carried that a committee be appointed to find a play and report” (Reel 1 0333). In this case, the disagreement is represented as having been handled in a very calm and reasonable manner — two members disagree, so a committee is appointed to research, present their findings, and allow the League to make a better-informed decision. The next example, however, shows how such procedures could

break down when we see Marot in February of 1909 justifying her refusal to abide by a committee's decision:

I want to say that the labor section of the drama and music committee recommended 'The Battle,' but I am not issuing tickets for this play. The committee stood three to two in favor of it, and the two members opposed to it were members of our executive board, Mr. Boyle and myself. I want to explain to you why we opposed it and I hope you will discourage your friends from going to the play. - The whole lesson of the play is that if any one has brains enough he is a rich man; if he lacks brains, he is poor. Mr. Boyle and I consider this an insult to labor. The contention of the other three members of the committee was that all working people recognize this as true and it would not hurt them. Our contention was that the greatest number of people who attended plays were people of leisure and that we should not by patronizing such a play encourage its performance on account of its false doctrine. (Reel 1 0423)

It is interesting to note in this example that the one speaking up most vehemently on labor's behalf isn't actually a member of the working class, which shows the complex nature of the barriers to solidarity within the League, which never quite fell along strictly class or gender lines.

We get another hint of both the conflicts that existed within the League and the unions with which they work in their comments about their relationship with the press. On April 27, 1909, we see that one item of business for the meeting was as follows, "under discussion for information as to future publicity, it was decided that for the present it would be unwise to invite reporters to our monthly meetings. There might be things come up at such meetings that we would not care to get into the papers" (Reel 1 0445). This is also evidence for the fact that the

League was very conscious of their public image and wished to keep a tight rein on how they were represented in public. Similarly, earlier that year in January, we see the League censuring one of their members for what she said to the press: “the secretary was instructed to write to Mrs. Dorr explaining that the league considered it a breach of etiquette for any members to publish an item of news in regard to the Union without first ascertaining from the Union whether the news was correct” (Reel 1 0406). Of course, based on later examples I will examine, it is not at all clear that the League would have condoned Mrs. Dorr saying anything negative publicly about the union even if it were true.

The last barrier to solidarity I will examine for this time period involves their complicated relationship with Central Bodies. This relationship always seemed to be somewhat strained. On the one hand, the League seemed pleased when on April 5, 1909 the “announcement was made that the Brooklyn Central Labor Union would seat fraternal delegates from the Women’s Trade Union League. Miss Dreier and Miss Svenson were elected” (Reel 1 0440). Their pleasure quickly soured, however, when they reported April 27, 1909 that the Central Federated Union had “replied, saying that two delegates would be seated without voice or vote. This seemed a most unsatisfactory reply, and Miss Dreier and I saw the Secretary of the Central Federated Union, who suggests that we write asking for an explanation, and that he will ask us to appear before the Executive Council next Friday” (Reel 1 0447). While it is reported on May 25, 1909 that both bodies ultimately decided to allow the League representatives to be sent as full delegates with voice and vote (Reel 1 0461), the fact that they had to fight to get it undermined their faith in and solidarity with men in the labor movement and also threatened the League’s sense of itself as an integral part of that movement.

The Glory Days: 1909-1913

Solidarity as Affirmation

As we turn our attention to the next time period, we find the League continuing to frequently record compliments of themselves from others as well as their own positive assessments of their members and their work. To begin, we see on November 17, 1909 in the Secretary's report, that "enquiries in regard to the League and interest in the League work are increasing daily, the outside office is almost like an open and continuous reception" (Reel 1 0520). In October of 1910, we see a positive exchange regarding a labor body. First, "a letter was read from the Workingmen's State Federation Convention, ordered by the convention thanking the League for sending Miss O'Reilly and expressing their appreciation of her value to the convention" (Reel 1 0620-0621), then we hear that O'Reilly reported of the same that "she was given a warm reception and there was unusual evidence of the men's interest in the work of the League" (Reel 1 0626). We see them spinning a request that they "welcome the British delegates to the American Federation of Labor Convention," leading to them spending two or three days in "fear they would lose their way in our great and wonderful city" (Reel 1 0647) in November of 1910 as an example of the AFL's trust in them and we see in September of 1912 that "Mrs Heaffely reported that the Neckwear Makers were grateful to the League for sending Miss Schneiderman." (Reel 1 1053). Another example of affirmation coming from unions is seen when the League reports on their annual ball in November of 1912 that "all the Unions had been visited; that 62 Unions had taken tickets and \$362.00 had been received from Unions" (Reel 1 1078).

The record also contains examples of their affirmation of one another, with a report in October of 1910 that “the League members have responded very well to the request for co-operation with the Entertainment Committee. The office has contributed a large share of its time to the Committee.” (Reel 1 0633), demonstrating that members did rise to the occasion for work at times, and that the full-time workers for the League were quick to commend them when they did, no doubt in an attempt to encourage more similar behavior in the future. They also report in January of 1911 that “since our last meeting one of our League members mounted a sample copy of all circulars which the League has had printed since 1907. The collection forms an interesting history which gives a different picture of the League work than we get from the annual reports” (Reel 1 0681). This example is interesting because in addition to affirming the contributions of a member, it indicates that the League is aware of the rhetorical nature of their image and how it can change based on the intended audience for their printed material: working women or the wider public for their circulars, existing members for their annual reports. We also see the League congratulating a member for her efforts in June of 1911 when they record that “the President reported that Miss Agnes Nestor had done a remarkable piece of legislative work in securing single handed the passage at the eleventh hour of the 10 Hour Bill” (Reel 1 0776). On a more personal note, we see one member in October of 1912 showing her gratitude to the League, with the record noting that “Miss Margaret Hinchey thanked the League for their remembrance of her at the time of her father’s death” (Reel 1 1070). All of these examples serve to build up the League’s image through positive reinforcement, as well as encouraging stronger emotional ties among members.

The League also continued to affirm other groups to show their solidarity with them. They still accomplished this through social events, planning as follows in March of 1910 after the great Strike of the Thirty Thousand: “a motion was carried that a dinner be given to the officers of the Ladies Waist Makers Union, the lawyers who volunteered their services during the strike, and other people other than League members, who gave special assistance” (Reel 1 0555). Additionally, they noted in October of 1910 that “eleven hundred invitations sent out to the Shirt Waist Makers who met at the League rooms during the strike, only about 30 appeared. Mrs. Elliot played and one of her friends sang. Miss Rauh recited and the girls danced and played games” (Reel 1 0633). One would think they would be disappointed by such a low turn out, but the record remains upbeat. Beginning in 1911, however, the nature of their affirmation-through-social-event changed from them going out of their way to throw parties for unions more towards their purchasing of a few dollars worth of tickets or accepting complimentary tickets for social events that unions planned on their own. The examples are too numerous to list them all, but here is a sampling:

Moved by Miss Marot, seconded by Miss Woerishoffer that we buy \$2.00 worth of tickets for the Ladies Waist Makers Union picnic. (Reel 1 0791) June 22, 1911

A communication was received from the Boot and Shoe Workers Union, enclosing complimentary tickets to a euchre party which they are about to give. The communication was received with appreciation. (Reel 1 0835) September 28, 1911

Moved by Miss Marot seconded by Miss Schneiderman that \$5.00 worth of tickets be purchased from Bindery Women’s Local #43 for the Ball. Carried. Members were requested to attend. (Reel 1 0865) November 23, 1911

Communication from the Bartenders' Local 3 enclosing 10 tickets was received and accepted with thanks.

Communication from the National Print Cutters Association enclosing 5 tickets was read.

A motion was carried that a letter be sent to the National Print Cutters Asn' stating that the League was not in a position to purchase tickets at the present time on account of the heavy drain in connection with the Laundry Workers Strike.

Letter from the Boot & Shoe Workers enclosing complimentary tickets for their Annual Ball was read.

The Secretary was instructed to acknowledge the tickets and thank the Union." (Reel 1 0928-0929) January 26, 1912

Five Tickets for the Central Labor Union Dinner Sunday September 1st were received.

Moved by Mrs Heaffely seconded by Miss Scheps that the five tickets be purchased and given to the representatives of the League. Carried. (Reel 1 1019) July 25, 1912

Letter from Building Employees Union enclosing \$5.00 worth of tickets was read.

A motion to purchase \$5.00 worth of tickets was lost. Motion amended to take \$2.50 worth of tickets was Carried." (Reel 1 1054) September 26, 1912

Letter from the Bartenders and tickets received with thanks. (Reel 2 0015) January 23, 1913

It is worth noting in these examples that the League, while generally inclined to support other groups through this type of gesture, they did not do so universally, sometimes purchasing a smaller amount, and sometimes refusing to purchase them altogether. While we can take at face value their excuse that the drain of an ongoing strike was the reason for one such refusal, it

seems likely that it was easier for the League to deny groups they weren't closely allied with in other endeavors. For example, even as the League's connections with the Label Committee and Elizabeth Dutcher were beginning to show signs of strain, the League still endorsed their activities, noting in January of 1913 that "the [Label] Committee was helping the Label Shop with its tea for the first Saturday in February. A motion was carried that the report be accepted and the League attend in a body" (Reel 2 0005). Admittedly though, the response at the following month's meeting to Miss Dutcher's repeated invitation to the tea, which is one of my favorite statements in the entire record, in which "the delegate from the Textile Workers asked if the label on the goods sold in the Label shop were label labels" (Reel 2 0019), certainly revealed some of the distrust that at least some members felt towards that faction of the League.

The League also engaged in other similar acts of solidarity, such as sending a congratulatory telegram to the International Garment Workers Convention in Boston in June of 1910 (Reel 1 0590) and then sending the following resolution in November of 1910: "Resolved: That the Women's Trade Union League of New York send greetings to the workers on strike in Los Angeles and extend to them their sympathy and their determination to do all in their power to uphold on the Eastern Coast, as they are upholding on the Western Coast the right of the workers to organize into trade unions and to secure through their organization a better and higher standard of living" (Reel 1 0622). Following the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in March of 1911, we find the League carrying a motion "that notices be sent to members asking them to take part in the funeral procession to be held on Wednesday" (Reel 1 0733), in order to show their support for the families of the victims. In February of 1912, the League also instituted a new official means of showing their appreciation and solidarity as follows, "a motion was carried that

a letter of thanks be sent to Mrs Morganthau and Mr. Cohen for their very valuable help during the Laundry Strike in bailing out arrested strikers, and that the officers of the League be given permanent authority to send such letters of appreciation without the opinion of the Board” (Reel 1 0941).

One recurring method that the League employed for reinforcing their solidarity with labor was taking part in the annual Labor Day Parade hosted by the Central Federated Union. In June of 1911, the League decided to “notify the C.F.U. we will participate in the parade.” (Reel 1 0791), and the following month they were recruiting others to join in: “I went to a meeting of the Neckwear Makers and the New York Hat Trimmers to ask them to take part in the Labor Day Parade. Both the unions voted to do so” (Reel 1 0815), with the Neckwear Makers voting to not only affiliate with the League and to take part in the Labor Day Parade, but also to donate \$25.00 towards parade expenses (Reel 1 0819). In July of 1912, we see them again accepting the CFU’s invitation (Reel 1 1019), this time opting to also donate \$5.00 to help “defray expenses of the Labor Day Parade” (Reel 1 1027) and also encouraging their members in a unique way: “Boating Party. Miss Morgan reported that they had suggested August 10th. as a possible date for the next boat ride and decided to leave it to the League to take final action. Miss O’Reilly recommended that every girl who took a ticket pledge herself to march in the Labor Day Parade and do what she could to make the parade a success” (Reel 1 1027). Prior to endorsing the CFU’s parade, the League had also supported in November of 1910 the “Central Labor Union’s proposition of a universal Union Label Fair movement” and urged “the endorsement of such a movement by the delegates at the American Federation of Labor Convention and instruct its representative to work for the endorsement” (Reel 1 0639-0640).

The League also showed support for various unions through the words spoken about them in their meetings, such as when Leonora O'Reilly reported in August of 1910 "that Madame Irene corset workers that came out on strike in protest to a charge for needles and thread, while the girls had lost their claim, a union had been formed" (Reel 1 0617). In this case, we see them once again turning a potentially disappointing outcome into an endorsement for their methods of organization and overall goals. Similarly, in February of 1911, we hear Helen Marot reporting on the progress towards solidarity with the League's ideology that she sees in another union:

Through frequent conferences with officers of the Int. Ladies Garment Workers Union, outside of the regular conferences with the Shirt Waist Makers we are gradually bringing about a better adjustment in not only the Union affairs, but in the understanding between the leaders of these unions and the League. I believe that this new effort at mutual understanding has been one of the most, if not the most important opportunity the League has ever had to introduce into the Jewish trade unions its own special measures" (Reel 1 0705-0706)

Of course, such statements also act to affirm the merits of the League, while also hinting at Marot's distaste for the methods employed by those "Jewish trade unions."

Finally, the League encouraged solidarity by responding to requests that they support, or condemn, certain actions or legislation. To illustrate what this looked like in terms of their support, in June of 1911, "Miss Dreier read a communication from Mr. Marsh asking us to endorse Bill on halving taxation which had been endorsed by all labor bodies. Moved by Miss Schneiderman, seconded by Miss Svenson that the Bill be endorsed. CARRIED" (Reel 1

0790-0791). Again, on July 27, 1911, “a letter from the Socialist Party was read in reference to the subway being built under union conditions. Moved by Miss Svenson seconded by Miss Scott that the President be instructed to write a letter to the Board of Estimate if not too late.

CARRIED.” (Reel 1 0819-0820). And finally, on December 2, 1912, “A letter from the National League requesting the New York League to telegraph the Hon. Theodore E. Burton, on the Seaman’s Bill. The Secretary was requested to send the telegram” (Reel 1 1097). In all of these cases, we see the League easily agreeing to support a cause, not because it is of vital importance to their own goals, but because through a simple letter or telegram they could show the mutual support between them and another group, no doubt hoping that those groups would respond in kind if the League ever called on them for support.

On the other hand, they could just as easily, if not more so given the greater number in the record, show solidarity with one group by condemning the actions or legislation of another. Their favorite form of this method was the passage of resolutions. On December 5, 1910, they passed a resolution in response to the Newark fire that killed twenty-five working women, which called for the following actions:

(1) That we demand a thorough investigation of all factory buildings from the authorities in charge: (2) That we call upon all organized labor in the city of New York to start a rigid inspection of all factory buildings independently of the one demanded of the city authorities: (3) That the Women’s Trade Union League organized for the protection of the life and welfare of the working women take the initiative by electing an investigation committee to co-operate with similar committees elected by other bodies. (Reel 1 0654)

On April 3, 1911, the League passed two similar resolutions: a heart-wrenching one in direct response to the Triangle fire, including the statement “Whereas, we feel the deepest indignation at the indifference and negligence of a apathetic public which was unavailingly appealed to after the Newark disaster, but could not be aroused to a sense of its responsibility toward securing protection for life and limb of the workers” (Reel 1 0732) and a second favoring an amendment of the New York State Constitution and the recall of the Judges currently interpreting it so that legislation like their Employers’ Liability Law might be effectively passed (Reel 1 0733). The juxtaposition of these two resolutions is particularly interesting given that they state in the first that “Whereas, most workers are in fear of dismissal in giving evidence and we know that only through organized workers themselves can the laws be effectively enforced, therefore be it Resolved, that we call upon the Central Labor Bodies of this city to call a conference of delegates of all trade unions for the purpose of concerted action in enforcing immediately necessary changes in factories for the protection of human life” (Reel 1 0732). On the one hand, they are claiming that organization is the key, that enforcement can’t happen without it, but they are also acknowledging that they need the power of the law and the courts on their side. This same combination of law and labor can be found in the resolution they penned in response to the “Titanic Disaster” on May 6, 1912 in which they state: “THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the Women’s Trade Union League of New York call upon Senator Alden J. Smith, Chairman of the Senate Investigating Committee and other members of the Committee, to inquire from the International Seamen’s Union of America, their standard of safety and efficiency, and that they consider the treatment of seamen as part of the standard” (Reel 1 0978). Because these resolutions were all in response to specific events, rather than requests from other bodies, they

acted, in our terms, primarily to show League members the value of the League's changing approach to dealing with workplace issues through a combination of legislation and unionism.

Of course, sometimes the League turned their displeasure directly onto the unions with whom they were trying to work. For example, in May of 1911, "the Board endorsed Miss Ecob's request that she be authorized to write to all labor bodies through the State whose legislative constituents failed to appear at the hearing on the 54 Hour Bill" (Reel 1 0762), indicating that they were now in a position to judge the actions of labor. More commonly as this time period progressed, they expressed disapproval of general strikes. In relation to the Leather Workers in July of 1911, the League "tried to persuade them not to have a General Strike and assured them it would be very difficult for them to raise money. The Union reported that a vote had been taken and that over four thousand had voted to go out. The General Strike was called on Tuesday July 25th. The papers had reported that Miss Dreier had called the General Strike of the Leather Workers. The President requested the members present to tell all their members that such action could not have been taken by her or by the League" (Reel 1 0821-0822). In this instance, the League is horrified to be given credit for causing an event with which they strongly disagreed. Again, in October of 1911, we find the League instructing their delegates to the ILGWU Convention "to state that the Women's Trade Union League will neither agitate for nor assist in the calling of a general strike, nor will it take part in such a strike if called; . . . that the League has made every effort to work in conjunction with Local 25 but that its co-operation has not been acceptable to that union, and that the League stands ready to work with the I.L.G.W.U. for the reorganization of the Shirt Waist Makers of New York. Carried" (Reel 1 0842-0844). This is an interesting picture of their attempts to still paint themselves as willing and receptive partners

even as they refuse to cooperate with this group who has failed to achieve solidarity with them in terms of methods or goals.

I'd like us to look at one final example of the League's construction of solidarity through affirmation during this period in order to show a little more of the context of just how many of these decisions could happen in rapid succession during one of their meetings. This excerpt comes from the meeting on February 5, 1912:

Communication from the Tenement House Committee asking that the League oppose the passage of Assembly Bill No. 412 Prt. No. 424 - Willmott. was read. A motion was carried to oppose the measure.

A letter was read from the State Federation asking the League to contribute to the unusual expenses in connection with the Compensation Act was read and ordered filed.

A letter was read from the Committee on Industrial Relations to secure the appointment of a Federal Commission. A motion was carried that the League endorse the request for such a Commission and write to President Taft stating the attitude of the League.

A letter was read from Mr. Joseph Beere of the Park Employees Protective Association announcing the disbandment of that organization and thanking the League for its co-operation.

Letter from Miss Henry in regard to the re-printing of Miss Pike's English lessons was read and Miss Pike instructed to write Miss Henry ordering one thousand of the re-prints." (Reel 1 0938-0939)

On the one hand, the rapid-fire nature of these decisions could undermine the idea that League members were thinking very critically about each one, but the sheer volume of them, on the other

hand, allowed the League to make much more nuanced statements about exactly who and what they would align themselves with ideologically during the course of each meeting.

Solidarity as Affiliation

The League also continued to build up their image of solidarity during this time through their affiliations. On the one hand, they did make efforts in February of 1911 to keep more League members feeling connected to the actions of the most active members through the release of a monthly League Bulletin, which they recorded as “an event in the League’s history . . . [that] evidently gave the membership items of interest and news which they had long wanted but had not know[n] just how to get,” which in turn “saved a good deal of work in the office” (Reel 1 0705), but they had a greater emphasis in their records on their efforts to connect with outside groups. Sometimes these affiliations were managed quite smoothly, as when in November of 1910 “a letter was read from Mr. Benjamin C. Marsh, Secretary of the Committee on Congestion of Population, requesting that representatives be elected from the League to a meeting to consider the appointment of a committee of private citizens to the Board of Estimate on New Sources of Revenue and that the letter had been especially addressed to the treasurer. A motion was carried to send Miss Woerishoffer, Miss Pratt and Miss O’Reilly to the meeting” (Reel 1 0638). At other times, the League declined to participate, as when in January of 1912 “a letter from Miss Ella Borland in regard to a tableaux at the Berkley Lyceum Feb. 1st asking the League to take part was received. The secretary was instructed to send a letter of regret on the League’s inability to take part” (Reel 1 0929). In still other cases, the League’s reaction was more complicated.

To illustrate, in May of 1912, the League was invited to join the Immigration Council of New York and “a motion to table the communication was lost. A motion carried that two members of the League be appointed to look into the matter of the League’s affiliation with the Council and report at the next meeting” (Reel 1 0975-0976). The following month, “Miss Rembaugh reported in regard to the advisability of the League affiliating with the Immigration Council and said that it would do no harm to have a representative go there” (Reel 1 1008). Despite this endorsement, however, the following discussion ensued:

Miss Lemlich asked if the League’s work was not organization and suggested that the work of the League was different from the other organizations affiliated with the Immigration Council.

The President suggested that there was a possibility of getting hold of the immigrant girls before they entered the industrial field.

Moved by Miss Hinchey seconded by Miss Svenson that the League send a representative to the Immigration Council. (Reel 1 1009)

They seemed to appease their consciences by making the following suggestion, which became a fairly typical move on their part: “Moved by Miss Bean seconded by Miss Scheps that the representative to the Immigration Council ask that all the clerical workers employed by the Council join the Book-keepers’ Stenographers’ and Accountants’ Union. Carried” (Reel 1 1009). Essentially, if their association with a group led to organization of the workers involved, it must be serving a worthy end, even if the upper-class ideology of the group in general might not mesh well with the League’s beliefs and goals.

The League eagerly joined the Joint Fire Prevention Committee in June of 1912, and continued to speak well of the group even as they mention a weakness: “Miss O’Reilly reported that she had attended the meetings twice, but that so few people came out and the meetings were not called to order. The few who were there were anxious to work and were counting on the co-operation of the League” (Reel 1 1019). In November of 1912, we find that “Miss Rembaugh reported that she had attended the Minimum Wage Conference called by the Consumers’ League. This conference had voted that the Consumers’ League with a Committee made up of representatives from other organizations investigate the situation as to wages in New York and report as to the feasibility of Wages Boards. Miss Rembaugh asked that her action in stating that the League would join such a committee be ratified. Her action was ratified” (Reel 1 1084). This action will prove problematic as the League discovers just how deeply they are divided over the issue of minimum wages, no doubt exasperated by the fact that the following February they endorse none other than Elizabeth Dutcher “as the League’s representative on the Consumers’ League Minimum Wage Conference” (Reel 2 0021).

Of course, the League also continued to affiliate with various labor organizations to show solidarity. The League in April of 1910, after “the Jewish Committee asked leave to take part in the Jewish First of May celebration, a delegate of the organizing committee asking the same for the English celebration” and so, “it was duly moved, seconded and carried that the League send two delegates to each First of May Conference” (Reel 1 0560). This shows the League’s attempts to become more multicultural in their associations. However, they were also careful to monitor their affiliations, instructing in November of 1910 “that organizations renting the Assembly rooms should be instructed to omit from their advertisements of their meetings the name of the

League using only the address” (Reel 1 0645). Apparently, some groups were worth accepting rent money from without being worthy of public association. Again, their connections with labor were often rocky. This becomes clear as we look at their attempts to give Carl Legien, first President of the International Federation of Trade Unions, a joint reception with the Central Federated Union and Central Labor Union when he passed through New York in July of 1912. They appointed a committee to look into doing so on April 25, 1912 (Reel 1 0970). In June, we see the following update, “Miss Bean reported that as a member of a Committee composed of delegates to Central Bodies which had met she had to report that the Brooklyn Central Labor Union had decided to hold a meeting for Carl Legien and that the Women’s Trade Union League could take part in the meeting through its delegates” (Reel 1 1001). They were not satisfied with this proposal, however, deciding after “general discussion” that “the League hold a meeting for Carl Legien in July in place of the regular business meeting of the League. Carried” (Reel 1 1004). In this case, solidarity was not so much about being compliant with this other group’s desires but in declaring their own equal right to host such a reception as similar participants in the labor movement. The League moved forward with their plans, stating at the end of that month that:

Notices of the Legien meeting have been sent to the League members; distributed at the Central Labor Union of Brooklyn June 23rd and an announcement of the meeting made from the floor; Mr. Bohm of the Central Federated Union will send out the notice with the reports to the unions affiliated with the C.F.U. the notices were also distributed at the B.S.& A. U. meeting; sent to German Branch Typographical Union; Officers of Big #6; and two of the Carpenters Unions. The reporters on “The New York Call” “New York

Journal and Tribune have been interviewed and promised good notices to appear July 6th.

We plan to have Miss Young put a notice in "The Post" also. (Reel 1 1015)

They appear to have been pleased with the outcome of their meeting, though the only mention of how it turned out is in relation to the cost of the ice cream and cake for the meeting and the fact that The Call, The World, and The Tribune all carried good press notices of the meeting (Reel 1 1023).

One association that the League made a high priority during this time was the Bakers' Union in their campaign against the Ward Baking Company and their Tip Top brand of bread. Now, considering that the Bakers' Union was not a women's union, this association was rooted more in the League's union label and auxiliary work of the last time period than of their more high-profile involvement in strikes of this period, but it gives a good picture of one of the ways that the League offered opportunities for their members to feel as if they are integral parts of the League even if they aren't up to hopping on a soap box and delivering a moving speech in favor of organization. The League became involved in the Bakers' dispute when they sent a delegate to the League's meeting in December of 1911. Upon hearing the underhanded way in which the Ward Baking Company was refusing to unionize its plant in New York City, undermining the many gains in conditions and wages that the Bakers' Union had won in recent years, the League first passed a resolution condemning Ward and calling on their members to support the union through the following:

Be it Resolved: That, inasmuch as the Bakery and Confectionery Workers Union has a label to distinguish its products, this body recommends and urges its membership to

refuse to patronize non-union shops, to buy only union-label bread, and to urge all friends and allies so to do; and

Be it Further Resolved: That, even in cases where union-label bread cannot be obtained, the Tip-Top be refused. (Reel 1 0879-0880)

This gives a clear and fairly simple way for League members to show their solidarity through their pocketbook. For those wanting to be a bit more involved, “the President further suggested that each member present report at the next League meeting how many each had dissuaded from buying Tip-Top Bread” (Reel 1 0880), and the following month, they were all urged to attend the Bakers’ Union’s mass meeting at Carnegie Hall (Reel 1 0907).

Another more sustained effort at solidarity that the League undertook during this time can be found in their efforts to create or join with committees looking to present a united front in terms of labor related legislation. In her Secretary’s report for November of 1909, we see that Helen Marot states that “I attended the annual meeting of the New York branch of the American Association for Labor Legislation and was elected a member of the Council. The labor members who were suggested that night were few and weak. I made several suggestions which were accepted, hoping later to add others to the council” (Reel 1 0519). In December of 1910, we find that the League’s Legislative Committee “had taken up the subject of Fire Protection and had asked for a joint committee from the Central bodies” (Reel 1 0663). The update in January was that they had voted to “call a conference of all bodies likely to be working for short hours bills, C.F.U., C.L.U., Consumers League, Labor Legislation Association, etc.”(Reel 1 0687) and then in March we are told that “The Conference organized by the Committee is known as the Joint Labor Legislative Conference, composed of delegates from the Legislative Committees of six

central union bodies in Greater New York. It was evident that a Central Body could be used as a clearing house for the Legislative measures of separate bodies, and so avoid unnecessary repetition in preparing legislation, and provide a simpler way of procuring co-operation” (Reel 1 0723). Despite having organized such a handy group, however, there were others, and they still voted to “send delegates to a conference of the Central Bodies to take up the subject of Fire Protection through union action” (Reel 1 0731) that April. They also continued to send a representative to the American Association for Labor Legislation, which Miss Rembaugh reported on attending in June of 1912. By then, the program of the group included the following bills:

1. Workingmen’s Compensation Constitutional Amendment.
2. Proposed Amendment to the 54 Hour Bill.
3. Jackson One Day’s Rest in Seven.
4. Sullivan-Brooks Referendum on Tax Rate.
5. Commission to enquire into Minimum Wages Board.
6. Commission of Physicians on Venereal Diseases. (Reel 1 1007-1008)

The League members objected to the fact that suffrage wasn’t part of the program and that the Association’s clerical workers were not members of the Bookkeepers, Stenographers, and Accountants’ Union, but they still voted to continue the connection (Reel 1 1008).

Finally, the League also maintained their image of solidarity through the sending of delegates to various union or Central Body conferences or meetings and through the receiving of delegates at their own meetings. To illustrate, in May of 1910 “a letter was read from the International Ladies Garment Workers inviting a fraternal delegate to their convention in Boston.

Miss Schneiderman was unanimously elected as delegate to attend the convention” (Reel 1 0576). Similarly, in August of 1910, “a communication from the Workingmen’s State Federation was read inviting delegates to the convention to be held in Buffalo. Miss O’Reilly was unanimously elected as delegate from the League” (Reel 1 0614). And again, in August of 1912, “Miss Melinda Scott was unanimously elected a delegate to the New York State Federation of Labor to be held September 17th 1912” (Reel 1 1028). These examples had the added solidarity-building benefit of unanimous elections indicating the unity of League members. In addition to attending conferences, the League was invited to serve directly with unions, as when in June of 1910 “a letter was read from Mr. Schindler, Secretary of the Waist Makers Union requesting that three members of the League be appointed to serve on the Executive Board of the Waist Makers Union. The following were appointed: - Miss Rose Schneiderman, Miss Rose Sashon, Miss Fannie Zincher” (Reel 1 0593). When these partnerships had positive results, the League was happy to report them, as when Leonora O’Reilly “reported from the Central Federated Union that two of the delegates had asked the co-operation of the League in helping organize women into unions” (Reel 1 0636) in November of 1910.

The League, in turn, encouraged the unions and Central Bodies associated with them to send their delegates to League meetings, though it does not appear that they were taken very seriously. In July of 1912, the League decided to systematically contact those unions whose delegates had not attended League meetings to try to get them to begin doing so, and got responses like the following:

Children’s Cloak and Reefer Makers — “their women spoke Jewish largely and would not be interested in attending our meetings”

Cloth Hat & Cap Lining Makers — “Will take up the matter of appointing a delegate in place of Miss Sashon who is now abroad”

White Goods Workers — “Mr. Shor of the White Goods Workers’ promised to send a list of active members of the Union and appoint two active delegates to attend League meetings”

Typographical Union N. 6. — “He said he would send me a list of names, but that it was difficult as they were listed in shops. I also talked with Bro. Cameron and asked him to send me a list of the women members. Bro. Cameron sent me a list of six women today and said if we received no response from these he would send some more”

Cloak Makers — “Mr. Bisno of the Cloak Makers Union talked with Miss Svenson in regard to our working with their women and as a result called up the Secretary’s of the two locals in which there were the most women and asked them to give us a list of their women. Mr. Guyer and Mr. Abrosky said they were calling meetings of their women members in a short time and would let us know so that women speakers could address their meetings.

Gold Leaf Layers & Stampers — “A letter was sent to Mr. Proute asking him to send us names of their active members but as yet nothing has been heard.” (Reel 1 1022-1023)

Among these mixed messages, it is interesting that the most eager responses were generally from those unions who were hoping to get something from the League right then, or in the near future, but the call still seemed to go unheeded even with them as in November of 1912 we again see a “motion carried that the Secretary communicate with the Unions asking them to see that their delegates attended regularly and that later representatives of the League should visit the Unions

and bring the importance of regular attendance at meetings before them” (Reel 1 1077).

Nevertheless, unions did continue to seek affiliation with the League, though they often had ulterior motives. For instance, when in January of 1913 the Wrapper and Kimona Makers’ Union sent a committee to the League’s meeting to ask to affiliate, with the not-so-kind remark that they “had been too busy in the past to affiliate and hoped they would be received,” and the League responded by asking “if they were not preparing for a strike and they said they were” (Reel 2 0007). It seems clear that they would still be “too busy” to affiliate with the League if it weren’t for their hope that the League would offer their support should the union go on strike. While the League positioned themselves in their account as if they were maintaining power in the relationship, putting them off by stating that “their application could not be acted upon by the League but had to be referred to the Executive Board” (Reel 2 0007), the Executive Board did ultimately accept their application (Reel 2 0015-0016).

Barriers to Solidarity

I turn now to the barriers to solidarity that the League faced during this time. The first barrier I will examine arises out of the League’s decision to adhere to the AFL’s brand of conservative trade unionism, which left them struggling over potential affiliations with more radical groups. The groups that the League seemed to be the most conflicted about partnering with, though they continued to do so on numerous occasions, were socialists. In June of 1911, the League accepted an offer from the Socialist Party to distribute literature for them (Reel 1 0791). In March of 1912, the Executive Board announced that they had “decided to take part with the Socialist Party in the Joint Mass meeting protesting against the treatment of the Lawrence strikers” (Reel 1 0947) and in April of 1912, Helen Marot stated that she was hoping

to have two weeks off to attend the Socialist Convention in order “to get a view of the labor movement from the representatives of the Socialists throughout the United States” because she felt “that it is important for us to understand the attitude of labor in all of the organized groups” (Reel 1 0961). Despite these affirmations of their connection, however, when the Socialist Party asked in June of 1912 for delegates to their Lawrence Conference, their initial motion to send delegates was amended “that the matter of sending delegates be referred to the Executive Board. The amendment was accepted and carried” (Reel 1 1004).

One of the clearest examples that they are actively thinking about what such connections might do for their group identity can be found in an event in early 1912. At their February meeting, it was “moved by Miss Marot seconded by Miss Svenson that the League take part in the mass meeting arranged by the Socialist Party of Manhattan to protest against the treatment of the Lawrence strikers and that the request that Miss Schneiderman speak at the meeting to present the attitude of the League be granted” (Reel 1 0940). Now, as noted above, the League did engage with the Socialist Party on many occasions, though it was often accompanied by some hesitation. In this case, they hesitated due to another connection: “it was the sense of the meeting that the Secretary should discover whether there was to be at the meeting a representative of the Industrial Workers of the World and whether the question of the A.F. of L. and the I.W.W. was to be discussed; that the Executive Board considered it unwise to take part in the meeting if such was the case, as it believed that the issue would be clouded and the strength of the protest weakened” (Reel 1 0940). They further decided that they ought to find out through the AFL what “the attitude of John Golden, representative of the United Textile Workers of America [was] towards the Lawrence strikers,” though they also decided that even if they didn’t

end up participating in the protest, it would be well for them to “urge the Congressional investigation into the treatment of the Lawrence strikers” by sending letters to Congressmen and President Taft (Reel 1 0940). In other words, they fully supported the Lawrence strikers and wanted them to receive fair treatment, but they were extremely cautious about entering into any partnerships to display that support that might not meet with the approval of the AFL, jeopardizing their standing with them. Further evidence for this can be found in the record for the following month’s meeting in which they state that “A communication from the I.W.W. of Passaic requesting relief was read. A motion was carried that a letter be sent in answer saying that the League could not take action at the present time” (Reel 1 0956).

Another area where we find this pulling back from radical associations is in the account of the League’s dispute with Eva McDonald Valesh, which first appeared in the record on January 28, 1910. Within the meeting minutes, the nature of her attack is never spelled out beyond that she had accused the League of doing something other than “pure and simple trade union work” and they felt that “no true trade unionist would have publicly accused the shirt waist makers union during their strike, stating that the men were using the girls for purposes of their own, but would have brought whatever charges they had against the Union before the Union itself or a central body” (Reel 1 0571-0572), but the context indicates (and other sources I will discuss in the final chapter agree) that Valesh had accused the League of being radical socialists. As a result of her words, League members refused to participate in a “conference to consider the organization of women” that she invited them to, though the membership was divided over the issue, reporting that “after much discussion the motion was carried that no representative of the New York Women’s Trade Union League be present at the conference called by Mrs. Valish.

Miss Kellor and Mrs. Blatch voted in the negative” (Reel 1 0532). This was considered an insufficient punishment, however. In March, we see the following: “It was moved by Miss Schneiderman that Mrs. Eva McDonald Valesh be requested to appear at the next meeting of the Board to show why her membership in the League be continued in view of the attack made by her on the integrity of the League and the attack also made by her on the Shirt Waist Makers Union during the strike. The motion was carried and the president requested to appoint a committee to take the matter up” (Reel 1 0556). In April, the committee drew up charges and wrote to Valesh, receiving in return a letter of resignation, which President Mary Dreir discussed with two AFL representatives, and the League decided to table, “pending final disposition of the charges” (Reel 1 0562-0563). On April 30, 1910, at a special meeting “called in accordance with the resolution passed at the last meeting that the Board meet on this date to hear Mrs. Eva MacDonald Valesh’s defense to charges preferred against her by Miss Schneiderman, and take action,” which Valesh did not attend, they went through a lengthy process to sustain the three charges they had made against her before unanimously deciding to expel her from the League (Reel 1 0571-0572). This over-the-top response to Valesh’s remarks indicates just how seriously the League took their public image and their perceived associations within the labor movement.

Similarly, in December of 1910, the record reports that “a motion was carried that a letter be sent to the Chairman of the Publicity Committee requesting that no material be published before official action had been taken on such material. Also that for the present all the material, before being published should be O.K. by the office” (Reel 1 0663). Additionally, when the League had decided that they would not support the Shirt Waist Makers second general strike in October of 1911, the League reported that “The day following the Convention of the Tailor’s

Council of New York a notice appeared in all the papers that the League had promised their support in the General Strike. Letters were sent to all the newspapers asking them to contradict the statement and a letter was sent to the Council protesting against their having given out this statement” (Reel 1 0848).

Perhaps the biggest barrier to the League’s solidarity during this time, however, arose between members who disagreed over whether the League should continue to work primarily with the East Side (read Jewish) unions and workers they had spent most of their efforts on thus far or if they ought to devote more attention to organizing native-born or more “Americanized” workers. Rose Schneiderman, as the League’s East Side Organizer, represented the former position, Secretary Helen Marot the latter. The first hint of trouble appeared in Marot’s report on April 27, 1911 in which, following an apology for her actions in the wake of the Triangle Fire (which I will examine shortly), she goes on a tirade against organization on the East Side. She betrays some pretty serious prejudices against these women, stating “we have always realized for several years that the Russian-Jews had little sense of administration and we have been used to ascribing their failure to their depending solely on their emotions and not on constructive work. This is the fundamental cause of their failure” (Reel 1 0749). She goes on to criticize their leaders as incompetent and laments that “whenever a strike is called, these men, in spite of records of failure are appointed to the places of authority. This continues because neither these men nor the people have any standards for organization nor any realization of how to get them. I say they have none” (Reel 1 0749). This emphatic denunciation is followed by a positive assessment of the recently organized Neckwear Makers’ Union, which she sees as “a wonderful example to the down town union of difference in methods” and “indicates to us from where the

East Side workers are to get their strength and gives us our line of policy” (Reel 1 0749). In addition, she feels that the League can help by teaching the East Side workers the difference between good and bad leadership by endorsing nominees they approve of and opposing others (Reel 1 0750).

Not satisfied with internal complaints, however, Marot sent a letter to the labor newspaper, *The Forwards* or *Vorwartz*, the following month publicly airing her grievances against the East Side labor leaders. Her letter begins with a statement regarding the League’s seven-year commitment to the East Side, adding that they have concentrated their organization efforts there “in response to the splendid spirit and the wonderful thing we call grit of the Russian girl. It is an inspiration to work with her” (Reel 1 0772). She immediately turns to criticism, though, declaring:

But after seven years of strenuous effort to maintain the unions which she so readily starts we are beginning to wonder whether we should not concentrate our efforts on other groups, --who will after organization is established see that it is maintained . . . The mushroom growth of a union is due to the revolutionary spirit of the people and their failure to maintain their unions is their inability to grasp the fact that their employers, who are business men, must be fought not with fine phrases or idealistic sentiments, but with business methods. The people with childlike faith have placed in the offices of their unions, men of eloquence, men who held in common with them a vision of brotherhood . . . The trade union we seek to establish is not attempting to bring the co-operative commonwealth but it is fighting for enough of the wealth today, to make it possible for us to fight for the morrow . . . A misgoverned, a badly managed union is

worse than no union. A trade union is not a propaganda organization, but a weapon to wrest here and now some of the wealth of the world for the workers. It is becoming clear to the League that it is a betrayal of the faith and fine spirit of the girls to encourage them to organize into trade unions, if their union is to be dominated by men without business sense or executive ability. (Reel 1 0772-0774)

She ends her letter with a call for help from the Forwards towards electing “efficient administrators” in the Waist Makers’ upcoming election (Reel 1 0774).

Now, as one would expect given the League’s reaction to others who bad-mouthed the League or the unions with whom they worked, Marot was chastised for this bit of publicity, but only very mildly. At the Executive Board meeting on May 25, 1911, we read that “Miss O’Reilly moved that the Executive Board regretted the action of the Secretary in regard to her letter to the Forwards and asked that no criticism of trade union organization should be published through the newspapers without the authority of the Executive Board. Carried” (Reel 1 0761). Despite this censure, however, the next month on June 22, we see Marot reporting that:

I have been talking to Molles Scheps in regard to the girls in the up town shops agitating through their members for an up-town branch of the Shirt Waist Makers Union . . . I am sure there are a great many girls ready for this, especially those who cannot understand the business of the Union as it is carried on in Yiddish and who have lost faith in the administration. It seems to me the only way to solve the differences between the English and Jewish Branches of the trade is to have branch locals. This method is working most successfully in the Neckwear Makers and it seems to me might be successful in the Shirt Waist Makers. (Reel 1 0793-0794)

Clearly her determination to turn the League towards organizing English-speaking workers was undeterred by the disapproval she had met with over her methods.

Indeed, in October of 1911, we see her again attempting to maneuver the League towards her position, arguing in her report that:

Up to the present time the League has always co-operated with the unions to the full in accordance with the plans the union has mapped out; in taking the position with the Shirt Waist Makers the League has for the first time changed our policy and as I understand it, it is not confined to the Shirt Waist Makers, but it is the stand which we must continue in regard to the methods followed by the East Side Unions. As the Jewish working women are greater numerically than any other nationality it will be necessary for us if we are to make them understand our refusal to accept their methods to show them what our methods are; and the League having been the kind sister must be able to show absolute results in organization. It seems to me that the League should seriously consider throwing its energy into pushing organization among other groups of workers, keeping the door always open to the working women connected with the East Side unions giving them always the opportunity to come into organizations on the basis approved by the American trade unionists. (Reel 1 0848-0849)

The best proof of her effectiveness in ultimately getting her way in this regard in the record, however, is the February 5, 1912 note in the meeting minutes of a "Letter from Miss Schneiderman resigning as East Side organizer was read" with the following comment: "In view of the League's change of policy in regard to East Side organization work the resignation was received. It seemed to the Board that the resignation was necessary and the matter was turned

over to the President and Secretary” (Reel 1 0939). Schneiderman did not remain gone for long, but her resignation, and the Board’s ready acceptance of it, at that time was a clear indication that the League had changed its priorities and alliances, resulting in a major disruption to their internal unity.

This turn of events was particularly surprising given the apology mentioned above that Marot had felt was necessary in April of 1911. Granted, Marot’s “apology” was more of a justification than anything else and contained several accusations of others in its midst, but it is most interesting for what it reveals about the League’s sense of themselves in relation to the wider labor movement and their stormy interactions. The reason Marot gives for her apology was that she had overstepped her authority as League Secretary following the Triangle Fire by calling for a citizens meeting without the sanction of the Executive Board, Legislative Committee, or of other labor leaders. Her contrition, as far as it went, was to state that:

It has become clear to me and I think to many others that the League cannot take such action. First the League is not an official part of the trade union movement. (2) It has through its integrity and labor secured the confidence of the official movement. (3) It has on this account developed power among the workers. For these reasons therefore, it is necessary for the League to act with greater care than a union or section of the official movement. For another reason it is important that the League does not take the initiative in calling on forces outside of the labor group to secure action. It is that the League composed as it is of two groups of people unionists and sympathizers is in danger of creating a feeling that the latter look for strength to other forces than labor and thus by

inference deny the very reason the Leagues existence to help labor meet its situations.

(Reel 1 0747)

This statement indicates how the League understood its relationship to the wider movement, and helps explain why they so often adopted a posture of deference for the plans and wishes of unions, though again, when compared with the position she takes so soon afterwards, and which the League ultimately adopts, of trying to impose their preferred methods onto the East Side unions, this posture of deference appears untenable for long.

Marot continues in her report with the suggestion that Committee Chairmen and the Executive Board ought “never fail to call to time officers who are unduly aggressive,” followed by the interesting argument that:

It is not a coincidence that the spring brings with it some friction and misunderstandings between the active workers of the League. The members will remember a year ago that the Executive Board was plunged into heartrending disputes which cleared away after vacations had been taken and all were refreshed and in shape for work. Again, this year I am quite sure if we had not been worn to the last thread at the time of the fire we could have met the situation which confronted us in our usual spirit of co-operation and helpfulness . . . It is however not only the work we do, but the knowledge that we are not meeting the situation that is most nerve racking. I therefore submit that the remedy is an increase of workers. (Reel 1 0747-0749)

The most striking aspect of this particular quote the first time I came across it was that I had found no indication whatsoever in the record from the previous year of the “heartrending disputes” she references. All had appeared calm in the minutes. Her statement is noteworthy,

however, because it also indicates that cooperation and helpfulness are their default positions, or at least, the ones that they fall back on again and again to conjure the existence of a united group out of the many individuals contributing to its makeup.

One final barrier I'd like to discuss before moving onto the next time period has to do with a disagreement between the League and the Consumers' League as to just what the methods of organization they ought to be using were. On December 4, 1912, we find the League discussing a proposed meeting with the Consumers' League, the purpose of which was "to lay before the public the value of the protocol agreement endorsed and advocated by the International Ladies Garment Workers as the most valuable method they had discovered for organization. The public would be called upon to endorse the [ILGWU's] method of organization" (Reel 1 1099). The League carried a motion that they could not call such a meeting, and the list of member reasons that followed contained some important insights into the thought that they were putting into their image:

Miss O'Reilly thought it would not in the end strengthen labor; that it would be a step backward for the League and step forward for the Consumers' League. Mollie Scheps said that she thought it would be a great mistake for the League to take any part in such a movement until the Waist Makers had acted favorably. Alice Bean thought that such action would mean a change of the general policy of the League and effect our relations with other trade union organizations . . . Helen Marot stated that . . . if they endorsed the protocol method that they would be in a weak position in co-operating with all other unions not affiliated with the [ILGWU] who might prefer to fight the fight themselves

with the employers without interference of representatives from the public. (Reel 1 1099-1101)

Of course, this decision to not align themselves with the protocol method of the ILGWU was complicated by the fact that the other major force in organizing this trade was the United Garment Workers, and they were also often at odds with the League as, for example, when Rose Schneiderman reported in April of 1911 that a Mrs. Levine had informed her that “the United Garment Workers had offered her a position as organizer on condition that she would not work with the Women’s Trade Union League” (Reel 1 0739).

The Turn to Legislation: 1913-1919

Solidarity as Affirmation

I turn now to the final time period under examination of the League’s activities towards creating solidarity within their ranks. Once again, I will begin by considering how they used affirmations of themselves and others to accomplish this. Despite the ideological shift away from strikes that we saw in the last section, the majority of the compliments that the League recorded receiving during this time were still a matter of gratitude for the League’s help during strikes. For example, on March 27, 1913 we read that a “letter from the Straw Panama Ladies Hatters Union Local 2 thanking the League for its co-operation in their recent strike was received” (Reel 2 0047), and on April 24, 1914 we see that “communications were also received from Miss Helen Ronan Secretary of the Porcelain Finishers of Trenton and the President and Secretary of the Brick Tile & Terra Cotta Workers Alliance thanking the League for its help in the strike of the Porcelain Workers of Trenton” (Reel 2 0061). Of particular interest is the case in December of 1914 and January of 1915 of the League receiving thanks for helping settle a strike both from

“the Percy Kent Bag Strikers” (Reel 2 0331) and “Mr Sparks a member of the firm of Percy Kent Co., in whose factory the Bag Strike took place” (Reel 2 0326). This shows that they were an asset not only to workers, but to employers, as well. In May of 1914 they were also told “that the Neckwear Makers’ Union expressed their appreciation of the League in helping them to prepare a circular and hold street meetings” (Reel 2 0257).

As noted in previous time periods, the League also took the time to pat themselves on the backs a bit, noting in May of 1915 of their current organizing efforts that “it is interesting to note that the one person most active in getting these people to organize is the Italian who during the time of the Percy Kent Bag Strike was instrumental in getting all the strike breakers. We have made him see the larger thing and have put him to work in the interest of organization among his own people” (Reel 2 0385). In this case, their self-endorsement is fairly serious, showing their belief in their ability to win people over to the labor movement. In September of 1918, however, we get a much more lighthearted one in the report of Secretary Maud Swartz. She tells that:

I received an invitation to speak at the meeting of the Elevator and Switchboard Operator’s Union for last Sunday. This was quite the most amusing meeting I ever attended, as outside of myself, Mr. Marks of the American Federation of Labor and five musicians, no one showed up to the meeting, except the President of the Union, so that after we had all waited an hour, we went home. This shows us that we need not be discouraged when we only get a few members to our meetings, as at least we always have more members than there are speakers. (Reel 2 0650)

It is refreshing to see the League building up camaraderie among their members through such joking as well as through their more earnest expressions of success.

Their endorsements of others were far more common, however. The most common form was much as we saw in previous times, when they receive a request to endorse something or someone and do so, it would appear more as an affirmation of their connection to the requesting body than out of any real sense of commitment to the thing endorsed. Of course, if the relationship isn't important to them, they may refuse outright, or they may simply not respond, or they might decline while still sending their sympathy or moral support. Each response sends a different, yet clear, message to League members regarding how they ought to value that requesting party. The following are a representative sampling of times when the League acquiesced easily to a request, with the date they appeared in the record:

A letter from the American Association for Labor Legislation was received asking the League to co-operate in urging the passage of the Murtaugh Jackson Bill. A motion was carried instructing the Secretary to write the Insurance Committee of the Senate urging the passage of the bill. (Reel 2 0045-0046) March 27, 1913

The letters were sent out as requested by Bookkeepers Stenographers & Accountants' Union endorsing the amendment of Factory Commission Bill No. 32. (Reel 2 0048) March 27, 1913

At the request of the National Consumers' League letters were sent to all the New York Representatives in Congress in behalf of the Eight Hour Bill for women employed in the various occupations in the District of Columbia. (Reel 2 0209) January 22, 1914

A committee from the Central Federated Union asked us to write Mayor and Police Commissioner, protesting against the refusal of halls to Socialists to hold meetings in. It was moved and seconded that this be complied with. (Reel 2 0689) February 3, 1919

In each of these cases, the League was already involved in cooperative efforts with the requesting groups, and the message of their easy acquiescence was that they wished to continue those connections.

They didn't always comply, however, so we must also look at several examples of when they refused. First, let's look at a few times when they tried to let the other group down easy:

Communication from Ipswich strikers asking aid. It was moved and seconded that we write them that we have no money but send our sympathy. (Reel 2 0113) July 24, 1913
Miss Schneiderman reported that the United Hebrew Trades are going to publish a History of the Jewish Labor Movement to be printed in Yiddish and she did not think that the League was in a position to contribute to the expense of the publication.

Moved by Miss Schneiderman seconded by Mrs Elliot that a letter be sent to the United Hebrew Trades telling them that the League was unable to give them financial support at this time and assuring them of our moral support. Carried. (Reel 2 0140-0141)

September 25, 1913

Letter from Mrs Crystal Eastman Benedict asking that the League endorse her as a member of the Compensation Committee. Moved and seconded that a letter be sent to Mrs Benedict saying that the League could not endorse her at this time as we had been asked to endorse others and would be continually requested to do this once we established the precedent. Carried. (Reel 2 0222) February 26, 1914

Miss Marot stated that she had received a letter from Miss Woodbridge of the Woman's Prison Association asking that the League endorse her as a member of the State Prison Commission, which is an unsalaried position. Moved and seconded that the Secretary be

instructed to write to Miss Woodbridge telling her that though the League would be strongly in favor of endorsing her as a Commissioner it was not possible for the League to do so having taken the position of not endorsing any public officials. Carried.” (Reel 0230) March 2, 1914

It is interesting to note that even within this small sample we can see some variance and the clear rhetorical distinctions indicating the level of true support or regret over being unable to help that they felt. The clearest demonstration of this is between the two responses to women asking for the League’s endorsement. The first example reads as an excuse easily given, while the second shows their clear support for this person combined with their acute awareness that they had just made a refusal based on principle the month before and would appear inconsistent and biased if they complied with this new request. Nevertheless, all of them show active efforts to maintain relationships despite the fact that complying with their request would conflict with League policy or with their budget restrictions.

The other examples of this type of would-be solidarity are those in which the League opted to simply ignore them, declaring them “received,” “filed,” or “tabled” with no further action taken:

Letter asking us to endorse Mr. Lynch as Commissioner of Labor New York State.

Communication received. (Reel 2 0113) July 24, 1913

Letter from the Pearl Button Workers Union asking for financial assistance. Letter received and placed on file. (Reel 2 0127) September 2, 1913

Letter from Paper Makers Union asking for funds to help them in their strike received and filed. (Reel 2 0205) January 22, 1914

Communication from Textile Workers asking us to assist in stamping out the Industrial White Slavery in the Cotton Mills of the South -- Communication filed. (Reel 2 0271)

July 6, 1914

Letter from Central Federated Union of New York announcing the candidacy of James P. Holland for President of the N.Y. Stated Federation of Labor asking that the name of our delegate be sent so that a conference can be held in July and plan mapped out for the successful election of their Delegate. Moved and seconded that the communication be tabled. Carried. (Reel 2 0396) July 12, 1915

Such decisions allow the League to avoid or at least delay confrontations that might arise out of direct refusals while still not having to participate in undesired activities.

It is interesting to note, as well, that the League, in addition to responding to these requests for action also sent out their own requests. For example, we find on October 23, 1913 that “the Law Enforcement Committee recommended that a letter be sent to the Industrial Board asking them to allow no exemptions in case of exits except those which have already been established by the law. Also that a letter be sent to the Central Bodies and the Unions asking them also to write to the Industrial Board in regard to this matter” (Reel 2 0158-0159). The following month, we see that their request was granted when we read that they received a “letter from the C.F.U. stating they had complied with the request of the League to write to the Industrial Board in regard to their power in making special exemptions” (Reel 2 0174). This is one instance where we can see that such affirmations of relationship were, in fact, reciprocal.

Along the same lines, the League continued to affirm (or deny) their solidarity with other groups through the practice of purchasing or exchanging tickets for various social events geared toward fund-raising or celebrating significant dates. Here are a few illustrative examples:

Tickets from the Textile Workers for Festival. Moved and seconded that the four tickets at 25cents be bought. Carried. (Reel 2 0142) September 25, 1913

Communication from the Association of Steamfitters enclosing tickets for their Ball.

Moved and seconded that same be returned. Carried.” (Reel 2 0223) February 26, 1914

Letter from United Hebrew Trades with invitation to attend their Anniversary received and motion carried that Miss Rose Blank be asked to represent the League. (Reel 2 0205) January 22, 1914

Invitation from Neckwear Makers Union to attend their Eighth Annual Ball to be held January 31st received with thanks.” (Reel 2 0205) January 22, 1914

Letter from Central Federated Union of New York enclosing tickets for picnic to be held Labor Day September 7th. Moved by Mrs Wise seconded by Miss Schneiderman that the 25 tickets at 25 cents each be bought and distributed among the members. Carried. (Reel 2 0278) August 24, 1914

The Ladies Waist and Dressmakers Union sent complimentary tickets for their Ball February 27th. Tickets accepted and distributed to Board members.” (Reel 2 0346) February 25, 1915

Once again, it is revealing to look at a larger chunk of the meeting minutes from one evening to see how decisions regarding these events could be made in rapid succession. On March 26, 1914,

for example we see a range of enthusiasm for the three different sets of tickets the League is faced with:

Tickets from the Central Federated Union for the benefit of the Calumet miners April 16th. Moved that \$5.00 worth of tickets be bought and as many sold as possible Carried. Communication from United Brotherhood of Tailors enclosing tickets for Ball March 28th received. Moved and seconded that Mrs Heaffely and Miss Eby represent the League at the Ball Carried.

Communication from Labor Council of Greater N.Y. enclosing tickets for drawing for the Benefit of the Call. Communication tabled. (Reel 2 0237)

They are eager to do what they can to help the Calumet miners (though they had also ruled the previous December that they could not use their strike fund to support them as it “is for the sole purpose of strikes or organization of working women” (Reel 2 0186)), they are willing to keep up their relationship with the Brotherhood of Tailors, but they feel no necessity to support the Call, a labor newspaper. The League also continued to show their solidarity with labor by marching in the Labor Day Parade (Reel 2 0119).

Following the granting of suffrage to women in New York State, they also developed a more comprehensive policy regarding how the League ought to act when called on to endorse political candidates, and how individuals members might act on their own. The issue arose at a September meeting in 1918, during which the League agreed to assist the State Suffrage Party in defeating the campaign of Senator Ottinger, yet held back from directly endorsing “Janet Rankin” for the same office, deciding instead to appoint a committee to “draw up a set of resolutions commending Janet Rankin, stating her record in reference to women, and that the

Executive Board recommend the regular meeting to adopt these resolutions” (Reel 2 0648-0649). When a member then inquired as to what “attitude an officer should take when asked to take sides for candidates during election” their reply was that “officers of the League shall be free to work for any candidate and act on any committee, so long as they do not do it as officials of the League” (Reel 2 0648-0649). This distinction between what officers do as League members versus what they do on their own time gives an interesting picture of how they viewed the actual makeup of their group’s identity.

They also defined their identity by showing their solidarity through what they disapproved of during this time. This most frequently took the form of some sort of protest, either in writing or through participation in a protest meeting. For example, in January of 1914, the League joined with representatives of the CFU and CLU to protest the Industrial Board extending exemptions to certain factories regarding current safety and hours laws (Reel 2 0193-0194), and that April they attended a protest meeting against the Mexican War (Reel 2 0251). In the latter case, we also get another glimpse into the thought the League put into such participation and their division of individual versus group action, with the Secretary noting “that in the future we have to be very careful in endorsing meeting[s] unless we know what they are for and who is running them and while we are in sympathy with the purpose of the meeting and not being in a position to have the League officially represented I asked Miss Schneiderman to attend as an individual and report” (Reel 2 0251). Additionally, the League recorded in April of 1916 that they would protest the Taylor Bills, which “were especially vicious and would practically break down all the fire laws” (Reel 2 0516), though it is unclear in this case what their act of protest would be. As for written protests, we can see the League noting in June of 1918

that a “letter of protest was sent by us to the Board of Education, regarding the action of the Board of Education in offering the new Manhattan Trade School building to the war board. We got in touch with a number of other organizations, asking them to protest” (Reel 2 0632). This example is telling because it shows them joining with other groups to make their protest, but it also reveals a bit about their position in regard to the war, which they rarely mentioned, but seemed disinclined to support. Indeed, their very first mention of the war came in February of 1915, when they decided to join again with their friends, the Baker’s Union, this time out of Chicago, however, in order to sign a petition asking “Congress that no more wheat, rye or other grain be exported from the U.S. as prices are going up and a number of smaller baking establishments have been compelled to suspend business and many workers had been thrown out,” which the League signed “not only on account of the bakers but to stop exportation on account of the war” (Reel 2 0346-0347). When they were invited in July of 1916 to send delegates to an Anti-Militarist Labor Conference, they also readily complied (Reel 2 0531).

Solidarity as Affiliation

The League continued to show solidarity through their affiliations both with groups inside and outside of the labor movement, reinforcing to members both their new and enduring associations and values. We’ll look first at some of their outside affiliations during this time. In February of 1913, the League accepted an invitation from the Woman’s Prison Association for a “conference in regard to the treatment of women in the night court” (Reel 2 0029), no doubt in response to their experience with the arrests of women pickets during strikes. In one of their biggest shows of solidarity across many groups, in January of 1914 they reported aiding a group of striking Umbrella Stick Handle Makers. They stated that:

The strike was a man's strike but they had been out on strike 13 weeks and were in need of food. A Committee had been formed of members of the Socialist Woman's Committee, members of the Union; the United Hebrew Trades, and the League and food distributed to 103 families. The League had had the co-operation of Mr. Woodruff of the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor in securing the food at wholesale prices and of the University Settlement in using the Settlement as headquarters for the distribution. (Reel 2 0192)

This shows the sort of claims that the League saw as superseding their typical goals and procedures, while certainly showing them in a positive and compassionate light that encouraged members to embrace such actions. When they were asked in July of 1914 to send a representative to the Women's Temporary Committee of the State of New York's Constitutional Convention, they agreed, but, as with their previous concerns over the Immigration Council's unorganized staff, sent them a letter "drawing their attention to the fact that there is no Union Label on their letter head" (Reel 2 0271), enabling the League, once more, to participate with a group outside of labor with the satisfaction that they were still forwarding the labor cause while doing so.

Their participation wasn't guaranteed, however, with them declining the February of 1915 invitation of the Lowell District Committee of the Charity Organization Society to the meetings of their district committee with a "dignified statement of the position of the League" (Reel 2 0346). Clearly they did not want to sully their reputation with workers by allying themselves with the all-too-often-condescending style of philanthropists. In May of 1914, we see them hesitating over a connection, wanting more information before engaging in even the bare minimum of contact for them, sending a speaker: "A letter was received from the Nocomo

Club asking for a speaker, It was moved that a letter be sent to them asking them for information in regard to their work and membership” (Reel 2 0257). In March of 1917, on the other hand, we see them declining membership in a kinder way, again revealing their sensibilities and values: “A letter was read from the Babies’ Welfare Association asking us to join that organization. It was moved and seconded that we write them that we are in complete sympathy with their work, but we would only hamper them as we would be obliged to ask them to use the union label on all their printed matter and to employ union clerical help” (Reel 2 0566). This one stands out to me because they seem so self-aware here that their demands are a burden not all can bear and they don’t sound so self-righteous as they sometimes do. They just know that their circles of interest couldn’t overlap in a helpful way, so they excuse themselves from participation while still affirming the group’s work to their members who hear the report.

The most interesting affiliation the League undertook during this time period came when they sent a representative to a June of 1918 conference at the YWCA with the Consumer’s League and someone from the Russel Sage Foundation “on the investigation to be made in regard to the problem of colored women in industry” which the YWCA was sponsoring to the tune of \$1,000.00 (Reel 2 0635-0636). Through this conference, the League was introduced to a woman whose name was spelled either “Mrs Macdougall” or “Mrs. MacDougald,” “a colored woman, in whom we are interested . . . She has a thorough understanding of colored people, and a very good labor point of view” (Reel 2 0651). This association is intriguing because, while the League had shown some early interest in the plight of workers of color, they now seem to have an upsurge in their commitment to addressing their concerns as well as those of other women workers, despite some indication of ambivalence among the general membership. To illustrate, in

October of 1918, we see the following: “Mrs Kleug of the Machinists’ Auxiliary reported that colored women were coming into their trade and were forming a serious problem, as the union is restricted to white people only” (Reel 2 0653). It is impossible to tell from the short excerpt whether Mrs. Kleug saw the problem as the new women entering the trade or the policies of the union, but the League’s involvement with Mrs. MacDougald and the YWCA’s investigation indicate that they were officially committing themselves to efforts at racial equality and integration. In January of 1919, they report some modest success in their attempts to organize Hand Ironers of color with the help of Mrs. MacDougald, by then a League member (Reel 2 0686), and also that their President has been “appointed temporarily on the United States Employment Advisory Committee on Colored People in Industry” (Reel 2 0687). In March of 1919, the President reports that she “spoke on the value of trade-unionism for colored workers at a colored church, the audience of which was large and decidedly appreciative and seemed to be very progressive” (Reel 2 0695). Whatever their shortcomings may have been in living up to these standards of solidarity across racial lines, their official records at least encouraged their members to believe that this was a worthy goal.

In another direction, the League showed some struggle in allying itself with the Working Women’s Protective Union, which, despite the name, was actually an upper-class-run group. In December of 1915, “after discussion on the object of the organization a motion was carried that the League accept the invitation to have its representatives sit on the Board as suggested” (Reel 2 0466). They continue to justify the decision the following month when they comment that “We have often wished when girls have called upon us that we had a legal department as we had no other place to send them but the Legal Aid Society and they did not always receive attention. We

feel that perhaps something can be done and the two organizations work closely together” (Reel 2 0475-0476). The following month, they agreed to host several lectures arranged by the WPU, including the somewhat dubious titles “Future Motherhood and Health,” “Social Hygiene,” and “Sex Problems” (Reel 2 0495), for which they sent a letter of appreciation to the WPU in May of 1916 noting the “splendid lectures given” (Reel 2 0522). Nevertheless, the League continued to try to guide such organizations towards solidarity with them, stating their intention in December of 1917 to “try and influence the large women’s organizations not to initiate any legislation for working women without consulting the League. Miss Dreier suggested that we call a special legislative conference of different organizations interested along these lines, to decide what action we shall take in the legislature this year” (Reel 2 0587).

Another association worth looking at is their evolving relationship with the Central Union Label Council. On September 25, 1913, “A letter was read from Miss Percival Chairman of the Label Committee, resigning as Chairman of the Committee and enclosing a check for \$21.12. Moved by Miss Schneiderman seconded by Mr. Boyle that in order not to conflict with the work of the Central Union Label Council the work of the Label Committee be discontinued” (Reel 2 0141-0142). The League would no longer spend time internally working for the use of the union label. They did, however, agree to send three delegates to conferences held by the Central Union Label Council in both July of 1914 (Reel 2 0271) and September of 1916 (Reel 2 0534). By March of 1917, however, the Executive Board of the League “Moved and seconded that we recommend to the regular meeting of the League that we resign from the Central Union Label Council. Carried” (Reel 2 0566). And thus ended their fight for the label.

Of course, the League was inclined to ally themselves more closely with other labor organizations. In one of the more humorous exchanges in the minutes, we find that the League elected two delegates in July of 1914 to attend the New York State Federation of Labor's Convention (Reel 2 0271). When they receive a letter the following month, "informing the League they were entitled to one delegate only," they responded by passing a motion to send both anyway (Reel 2 0278), in a move that shouts to members that they are important and powerful regardless of what outside groups might try to say. Granted, the following year when they receive a convention call from them, they appoint only one delegate without incident (Reel 2 0396), following the same procedure when another, this time Constitutional Convention, is called in September of 1915 (Reel 2 0413). One supposes that had their action in sending two delegates that first time been truly condemned, they would not have been invited back twice the following year. Then again, it is also worth considering whether the reason that the League opted not to choose between their two elected delegates had far more to do with the fact that they were Melinda Scott and Rose Schneiderman, who were all too often at odds with one another already, and they may have simply wanted to avoid the fallout from choosing one over the other.

The League continued to worry a bit over the fact that delegates from the affiliated unions did not attend League meetings during this time, suggesting ways they might reach out to them and encourage them to do so in October of 1914 (Reel 2 0291). Despite this apparent lack of interest in the League's general activities, they continued to make efforts to get the unions to participate in the meetings, conferences, and committees they called to address fire safety and other legislative matters dear to their hearts. To illustrate, the League held a special meeting on December 6, 1915 "to discuss Fire Conditions in Factories and that representatives from Unions

had been invited to attend the meeting” (Reel 2 0451), instructing those union delegates who had attended to “report back to their organizations the necessity for Fire Hazards Committees where complaints could be filed by the workers in the factories and reported to the Department of Labor; in case the Union was unable to take up this work the League would be glad to report any complaints referred to it” (Reel 2 0453). Again, in January of 1916, the League’s Secretary is instructed “to write to all the affiliated unions asking that members of the League be given permission to visit the shop meetings to request that at least two members from each shop be delegated as members to the Fire Hazard’s Committee of the League” (Reel 2 0480). By 1918, whether or not unions would be their only allies in their legislative attempts was a topic for discussion. In April of that year, we read the following: “general discussion was held on this question, especially as to whether we should invite all organizations or only trade unions. It was moved and seconded that a legislative conference be held either the latter part of May or early in June; that two delegates from each Union be invited, and that we invite as visitors the Consumers League and the New York State Woman Suffrage Party” (Reel 2 0614). They continued to place the participation of unions first, but they were also inclined to welcome more participants in, indicating their new direction in achieving change for women workers, while still affirming their former ties to the labor movement.

Finally, before turning to the barriers to solidarity during this time, I want to look at two examples of the clearly rhetorical positioning and thought process that League member’s went through as they maneuvered through various associations. The first is found in January of 1916 when President Melinda Scott, who was also the President of the Hat Trimmer’s Union of Newark, found herself in an awkward position:

I was asked to speak at a meeting of the Millinery Workers who were holding an Organization meeting in Beethoven Hall. It was a peculiar situation for me to be in as the Straw Sewers who are also included in the Millinery Workers by the Cap Makers Union should be members of my organization. We having jurisdiction over them . . . and I came to the conclusion it was better to have them organized under somebody even though they were not entitled to them, rather than not to have them organized at all, so I went to the meeting and spoke there. (Reel 2 0478)

The message she is sending to League members when making this statement is that the overarching goal of the League, organizing women into trade unions, outweighs in importance skirmishes that could be fought over jurisdiction or personal claims. The second instance is perhaps less uplifting, but no less revealing, when we read in January of 1919 of “an offer of several unions to form a joint educational committee with them. There being no money involved, it was moved and seconded that we co-operate with them” (Reel 2 0682). That bottom-line will intrude despite the best of ideological intentions.

Barriers to Solidarity

With that in mind, I turn to the barriers to solidarity that the League faced during this period. First, I’ll look at how their hesitant interactions with Socialists continued during this time. In February of 1913, the League responded to a “letter from Socialist Woman’s Committee in regard to naturalization of women asking the League’s co-operation” by asking the Secretary to “write the Committee asking for more information” (Reel 2 0029). In April of 1913, the League was invited to participate in a May Day Conference and parade composed of representatives of the Socialist Party and members of trade unions. They agreed, but only “after

much discussion” (Reel 2 0053). In May, they agreed to give the Naturalization Bureau of the Socialist Party a list of women’s unions and also to help them in distributing circulars (Reel 2 0064-0065), but in September they merely filed a request that they send delegates to the Socialist Party City Campaign’s Labor Union Conference (Reel 2 0143). In March of 1914, we see their ambivalence played out in back to back decisions:

Communication from the Socialist Party inviting the League to participate in the May Day Parade. No action taken.

Communication from the Socialist Party asking that resolutions be forwarded to the Board of Education, Board of Alderman, and Board of Estimate and Apportionment asking that the city build schools to provide work for the unemployed, and facilities for the education of the children. Moved and seconded that the resolutions be sent to the proper authorities. Carried. (Reel 2 0238)

It is noteworthy that the item they comply with is the more conservative of the two, which is in keeping with the general intents of social maternalism.

In May of 1914, we see the biggest direct confrontation that the League had with the Socialist Party and their representatives. The trouble arose over an incident that occurred during a League celebration and played out in the record as follows:

A letter was read from Mr. Malkiel complaining of the treatment of the Woman’s Committee of the Socialist Party at the League’s Anniversary meeting in Cooper Union, and tending his and Mrs. Malkiel’s resignation. Miss Scott explained that their accusations were not true . . . It was further resolved that the Executive Board desired to

state that the President of the League had never ordered anyone's arrest at the Cooper Union meeting or elsewhere. Motion Carried. (Reel 2 0258)

Letter was received from the Woman's Committee of the Socialist Party complaining of the treatment they received at the Anniversary meeting of the Women's Trade Union League. Motion made that a letter be sent to them stating that the President of the League had never ordered anyone's arrest at the Cooper Union meeting or any other place, and expressing surprise that they should use the same tactics as the capitalist class does in condemning people without giving them a chance of a hearing. Also that we say to the Woman's Committee that the Women's Trade Union League reserves the right as does the Socialist Party to say what literature shall be sold or distributed at meetings financed by them. Motion carried. (Reel 2 0258)

The only resolution that appeared came in June, when "a letter was then read from Mr. Malkiel asking that unless the League repudiated the action of a member of the League, that his resignation would not be withdrawn. On motion it was decided to accept Mr. Malkiel's resignation" (Reel 2 0266). Nevertheless, when the Socialist Party requested that they send delegates to a Labor Conference in October, they readily complied (Reel 2 0290), and in January of 1919, we see them still interacting with them, sending a speaker to the Intercollegiate Socialist Society Conference (Reel 2 0687).

Another group with whom the League always seemed to be struggling to achieve solidarity was the Central Federated Union of New York. They, too, had a bone to pick with the League over one of their celebrations, this time their annual fund-raising ball, which was to take place in the Amsterdam Opera House in 1914. The League went out of its way to appease them

however. We first see the issue in October of 1914 when a delegate from “the Waiters Union No. 1 reported on the floor at that meeting [of the CFU] that the Amsterdam Opera House was unfair and that the League was holding its Ball there” and the League responded immediately, talking with their accuser, and writing to various persons to have the matter “adjusted” (Reel 2 0300), with the further report that “Mr. Rosenthal met with the officers in regard to the organizing of the Amsterdam Opera House and we promised to work with them and try to bring about a settlement” (Reel 2 0303). Negotiations continued into November when we read that the Secretary “met with a Committee from the Bartenders and Waiters and Mr. Speck of the Amsterdam Opera House trying to bring about an adjustment so that the Ball could be held in a fair house. Succeeded in this matter” (Reel 2 0316). Whatever peace this settlement may have brought, they were at odds with them again in January of 1916, with the report that when the League representative to the CFU had requested the floor to speak on the League’s upcoming ball, she had “not been given the courtesy. Mrs Wolf felt that it was time the League knew where it stood” (Reel 2 0472-0473). Where the League stood with them became abundantly more clear that September, when the CFU “disenfranchised [the League] saying no central body has vote in other central body” (Reel 2 0533). On the one hand, by calling them a central body, the CFU is claiming that the League has equal status with them in the Labor movement, but the League doesn’t buy their reasoning. They also don’t take the ruling very calmly, variously wondering if they will be barred from other central bodies and demanding that they find out the exact particulars of when their vote was taken from them (Reel 2 0533). Leonora O’Reilly remained of the opinion that “the men were only bluffing on this matter” (Reel 2 0542).

Similarly, the League struggled with the Central Labor Union of Brooklyn. In this case, the trouble arose over statements made regarding the League on the floor of a CLU meeting, though, they, too, would complain about one of the League's major events. The complaint made was that "when the Boot & Shoe Workers applied to the League for help they had been refused at the time of a strike and also that Miss O'Reilly had advised against affiliating with the Central Labor Union of Brooklyn," but "Miss Dreier stated that the Boot & Shoe Workers requested pickets and some work was done on their shop strike by members of the League. It was discovered however, that the members of the Union themselves were not doing picket duty and the League decided that if the members themselves could not be persuaded to picket it was useless for the League to continue" (Reel 2 0375-0376). In response, we find in July that the League had ordered a letter sent to the CLU "in answer to statements made on the floor by delegates in regard to activities of the League and urging that no delegate be sent to the National Convention," which they stated "brought about a change of attitude and a delegate was sent to the Convention" (Reel 2 0399). Unfortunately, that same meeting brought the report that "the Delegate to the Central Labor Union of Brooklyn had reported there was nothing interesting to report on the National Convention of the Women's Trade Union League but that they had had non-union badges" (Reel 2 0395). Again the League was scrambling to make explanations (the badges were produced in a city that had no Badge Makers' union, which was small anyway, and all of the other workers involved in their production were union) and decided to send a letter to that effect to the CLU (Reel 2 0395-0396). In addition, the New York League made every effort to ensure that the badges at the next national convention did carry the Badge Makers Label (Reel 2 0501). Despite their best efforts, however, they were again addressing inquiries to the CLU in

October of 1917 due to reports that one of their organizers “spoke very disparagingly of the League, calling it a political organization and urging the girls not to accede to any request of ours” (Reel 2 0582). Given these two troubled affiliations with labor groups, it is no wonder that the League turned more and more to suffrage and legislation during this time to find their sense of themselves as a group.

The next barrier to solidarity that I need to address is the difference of opinion that arose among League members in regard to minimum wage. In August of 1914, “The President asked for discussion on Minimum Wage, so that if the matter came up at the State Convention the President would have a better understanding of the position the League wished to take. The meeting was a small one and with the exception of the delegates from the Retail Clerks’ none of the other members had given the matter much thought, but those present felt that it was dangerous legislation” (Reel 2 0274-0275). In November of 1914, a heated debate on the subject occurred at the Executive Board meeting, with Mary Dreier requesting that “she be recorded as not criticizing any one member or group of members in her discussion of the question” and a poll revealing four in favor and six opposed to minimum wage. As a result, they decided, again in a split decision, that “this [is] an inopportune time for the League to agitate for Minimum Wage Boards and therefore, inexpedient to fix its position on this question” (Reel 2 0313-0314). At their December meeting of the general membership, however, they went forward with their discussion of minimum wage, resulting in a “full discussion” and another split decision to uphold the Executive Board’s decision to not agitate for minimum wage boards (Reel 2 0318-0319). In an attempt to resolve their differences by following the lead of the wider labor movement, the League accepted that night an invitation to attend the Central Labor Union of Brooklyn’s

meeting to discuss minimum wage, sending four representatives, two for and two against (Reel 2 0319). In January, Helen Marot “reported as one of the Delegates opposed to Minimum Wage Legislation that the [CLU] had voted in favor of a resolution endorsing Minimum Wage Legislation for women. That both Miss Hogan and Miss Marot had spoken against the subject and had lost the day. There was no delegate from the winning side present” (Reel 2 0330). After that discussion, the League backed off from minimum wage, however, which can be seen as evidence that it truly was a serious barrier to their solidarity and therefore, rather than risk the continued harmony of their coalition, they dropped the issue despite the CLU’s endorsement of it.

I now turn to a couple of examples that show that the League was thinking through how they represented themselves to others in clearly rhetorical attempts to overcome certain obstacles to solidarity. In September of 1913, to begin, we find the League dealing with a complaint from the White Goods Workers Union regarding a letter that a League member, Sarah Parks, had sent out to the “chairladies of the various shops.” After listening to Parks’ explanation at length, they decided to send a letter back to the union, stating in part that they “were very regretful at the unwise wording of the letter but cannot be responsible for our members who do not bear our credentials and at this time Miss Parks was working with an outside group” (Reel 2 0146). Through this maneuver, the League managed to show some regret without taking responsibility, drawing on the benefit of being able to separate their group identity from that of their individual members. They showed a similar self-awareness in December of 1917 when they recorded the following discussion:

How can we retain friendly relations with officers and members of unions after strikes? Mr. Boyle suggested we keep in touch as much as possible with the officers so that they may know us. Miss Liftshitz believed the officers often had a feeling of jealousy towards the League after a strike and did not foster a friendly attitude in the members. Mr. Boyle suggested we send committees before women's unions to speak on the educational work of the League. We can emphasize the fact that we are a central body of women" (Reel 2 0585)

In this case, they are hoping that they can position themselves once more as the helper of labor rather than as a competitor for leadership positions in order to cultivate coalition, clearly considering the rhetorical effect of emphasizing one aspect of their activities over another.

Chapter 5: Sisterhood

This last findings chapter will cover those places in the record where the League invoked the idea of sisterhood in order to build coalition among their members. In this examination I will look at their value for women as leaders, their brand of feminism and the relationships that resulted from it, and their fight for expanded legal rights and protections for women, always considering their arguments for why they ought to work for the well-being of their sisters and the tensions arising out of class and cultural differences that could either prompt an appeal to sisterhood or thwart the success of one. In this light, then, sisterhood is not simply a bond among women, but a whole system of beliefs and values surrounding the role of women, their strengths and weaknesses, and their uniqueness from men. As with the two previous chapters, I will look at the development and deployment of these rhetorical postures of sisterhood over the course of the three major time periods outlined by Nancy Schrom Dye.

Early Organization: 1906-1909

Women as Leaders

Beginning early on in this time period, we find evidence of the League's absolute belief that women are capable of leadership and ought to be expected to exercise it. In November of 1906, for example, we find Mary Dreier declaring that "the purpose of the League [is] to discover the strong women in the trades and to depend upon them to bring out the other women" (Reel 1 0127-0128). Following that principle, in November of 1907 we find them describing their interactions with a group of striking women stating that "We have insisted on their managing their own meetings and their strike themselves, simply getting advice and co-operation from others. This was in marked comparison to the men who had come to help them.

They had started the idea among the girls that they must have a leader. It was interesting to see how the girls took up the idea of being their own leaders and how their interest increased as they elected different people on different committees” (Reel 1 0271-0272). The Annual Report for 1907-1908 further details their interactions with the White Goods Workers, stating that:

Ever since the formation of this organization of women the League has been in conference from time to time with its members and its executive board. It has urged on the women the necessity for managing their own affairs, and discouraged their dependence on their brothers in the conduct of their meetings. The members are now in entire control. The League has tried to convince the union of the value of affiliation with the national organization and the use of the label. At the time of a strike, in one of the white goods factories, the League acted as intermediary for the union. (Reel 22 0007)

In this example, it is interesting to note that while the League discourages this union’s dependence on male leadership, they see nothing at all wrong with the women of the League stepping in to help them during a strike. It also indicates, however, the great value that League members placed on the type of leadership training that women could gain by managing the day-to-day affairs of a union, much like the training many League members had gained through their work in women’s voluntary organizations prior to and including the WTUL.

In the same Annual Report for 1907-1908, we also see that the League at this time devoted a great deal of energy to organizing women’s auxiliaries to existing men’s unions, using them as a vehicle for promoting the union label. While their discussion of this work also included a description of a strong woman leader, “Miss Annie C. Patterson [who] originated the idea of the Auxiliary Committee and has been its chairman since its organization. She resigned

the chairmanship in February to take up auxiliary work under the new Label Council. The committee, under her strong leadership, has worked faithfully and efficiently, an everlasting illustration of what volunteer work can be with faith and determination to back it. The League can accept Miss Patterson's resignation with equanimity only because it realizes that her work can be more effectively carried on through the new organization" (Reel 22 0011-0012), such efforts could be a bit suspect in terms of the type of sisterhood the League more typically espoused, seeming less of an expression of women's empowerment as the auxiliaries were dependent on male organizations and were acting as helpmeets who forward the general labor cause through label work without a necessarily direct impact on the lives and working conditions of women wage earners. In a somewhat similar manner, we find the League in April of 1909 appointing Mrs. Blatch as a delegate to "attend the legislative hearing on the City Charter, demanding that the charter make the appointment of women as members of the Board of Education mandatory" (Reel 1 0440-0441). On the one hand, this is clearly promoting female leadership, but by limiting their demands to appointments to the Board of Education, they were keeping within already established norms for women's interference into government through social maternalism rather than pushing for new roles.

One case during this time where they did acknowledge new horizons for women's involvement in the political realm came in June of 1909. During their meeting, they listened to an account from Agnes Nestor of the "legislative fight they had made for an eight hour day [in Chicago]. Her description of the work was intensely interesting and stimulating, making every one realize how much more powerful an appeal to the Legislature for working women is when it comes from the workers themselves than when it comes from outside" (Reel 1 0469). While it

may have been inaccurate at this point for the League to claim that their efforts for legislation protecting working women met this criteria of arising from the workers themselves, it does set up for the League a standard of what their efforts in that regard ought to look like and whose involvement they must always be seeking.

Relationships Among and Understanding of Women

So how did the League record their relationship with working-class women during this time? Primarily, this relationship was characterized by a sense of hospitality. In terms of social hospitality, much as I noted in the last chapter, we find the League cooperating with the Button-hole Makers in April of 1906 to put on a ball, which they believed “had materially increased the friendly relations between the Unions and the League” (Reel 1 0094), but they also referenced hospitality repeatedly in regard to the renting of their rooms to working girls. In November of 1906, they record that “the question of charging rent in all cases for the use of the rooms for social or trade unions purposes was discussed the secretary thought there would be cases when it would seem inhospitable and contrary to the spirit of the League to charge rent on these occasions and that exceptions should be made” (Reel 1 0129). They couldn’t afford to not charge rent at all, but that same month we see the Secretary outlining her rationale for when hospitality ought to win out: “I did not charge the waitresses for either of these meetings. They were not meetings ordered by the unions and the expenses would have fallen on individual girls. I have no doubt some of them would have been willing to pay this, but it seems to me that the League must show hospitality to individual efforts of individual girls and when the rooms are not otherwise engaged, it seems to me that such meetings as these, it is quite proper not to charge for” (Reel 1 0136). The League was eager to participate in such acts of hospitality because they believed they

could lead towards success in organization. Evidence of this can be found in October of 1908 when they reported that “the effect of the celebrati[o]n it seems to me has been good. I heard of two working girls who knew nothing about the league or organization, who said, they had had the time of their lives in the parade with us and wanted to know more about the league and trade unionism” (Reel 1 0373). Of course, in this instance, their report of the success they had in reaching these working women was followed immediately by the statement that “some of our allies were disgruntled and I think all of our friends thought we might do better in regard to the luncheon another time” (Reel 1 0373), indicating the difficulty they faced in pleasing all of their sisters at once.

Nevertheless, their ability to come together as women was aided by their belief that they were different from men, evidence for which can be found in the record. For example, in January of 1908 they accede to the request of the Alliance Employment Bureau to find out what work the Bookbinders considered to be “women’s work, and what work men’s” (Reel 1 0297) with no effort on the part of the League to challenge the distinction among jobs. On a more positive note, in June of 1908, they record an interesting interaction with the AFL:

At the request of Mrs. Robins, our national president, I wrote to the American Federation of Labor urging that Miss Fitzgerald the national organizer be sent to New York to do much needed work in this city. The reply was that Miss Fitzgerald was no longer organizer and that they had sent my communication to Herman Robinson. Mr. Robinson’s letter in reply to mine was written on the assumption that my asking for Miss Fitzgerald’s assistance was a criticism on his work in New York. I replied to the A.F. of L. that my

letter was not criticism whatever but that our league still held the position that there was work with women unions that no other than a woman could do. (Reel 1 0344)

While this, too, reveals a belief that some work is better suited to one sex over the other, it at least is seeking to carve out a new space in which women might work for their mutual benefit.

In the summer of 1909, we find two polar opposite examples of the League working with men's unions, in keeping with the two examples of difference listed above. The first resents the entrance of women into their trade and undervalues women's abilities and contributions, the second accepts women and seeks out the special expertise of the League women to aid in their organization. To illustrate, on June 22, 1909, we read that League representatives "visited Local 252. There were about 150 men present at the meeting where we were given the floor. There was a great deal of opposition to the organization of women - the same attitude we find so often in the New York Locals - an attitude of resentment to the women entering the trade, and a want of confidence of the women's ability to organize" (Reel 1 0471). The most that the League could get out of them was a promise to form a committee to look into the organization of women in their trade, but the League planned to continue fighting for their sisters to be incorporated. In July, on the other hand, we find that League representatives visited "the cigar packers local of Brooklyn. We were very kindly received. The men said that the women were trying to get in the trade and that it was time that the women were organized; that they were willing to co-operate with the League, and would be very glad if the League took up the matter of organization; that it would be better for the League than for them, as there would be no suspicion of motive" (Reel 1 0480). In both cases, however, the differences between men and women are reinforced.

Of course, another difference which came up when the League sought to draw out sisterhood was class-based. One of the clearest examples of the League's awareness of this difference is found on January 23, 1908, when we find the Secretary bringing together two groups across a class divide, giving instructions to one as to how best to appeal rhetorically to the other:

A letter from Mrs. Ollesheimer asking for information in regard to Typographical #6 boycott. She wanted to bring up the matter before the Women's Conference of the Ethical Culture Society. At my request a representative of Typographical Union #6, called and I told him, so far as I could the point of view I though[t] the Ethical Society would be interested in having represented, and told him of their prejudices. I have selected from their printed matter what I though[t] would be the best to present at their conference, and asked them if they would not see one of the representatives of the Typographical Union.
(Reel 1 0297)

Similarly, in the Annual Report for 1908-1909 we find juxtaposed two different approaches to reaching women of different classes: "the committee has planned noon-hour meetings to be held in union shops once a week. Brief readings and talks, both serious and amusing, will be given, their purpose being to strengthen the feeling of union among the girls and to stimulate their interest in the general labor movement. To interest sympathizers in schools and colleges in the work of the league, the committee arranged for a meeting at Vassar, and are planning raids on Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke" (Reel 22 0029). Now the reason for a briefer description of how they are trying to reach the college women might be simply that they aren't the primary focus of the League's overall efforts, but even in that case, the lesser amount of coverage given

to them still reveals the League's keen awareness of the difference between the two groups, despite their protestations of sisterhood. Nevertheless, the passage also reveals the emphasis that the League placed on the need to "strengthen the feeling of union" among women with whom they were involved.

Before turning to their suffrage work during this time, I'd like to look at one example we get that illustrates what sort of feminism they were adhering to at this point. On July 27, 1909, we find the League discussing float ideas for the upcoming Labor Day parade. Two of the three ideas are of particular interest for us. The first was to "have the shield with two women bearing banners having the motto 'Eight Hour Day and Living Wage to Guard The Home!'" (Reel 1 0475). While I can't tell from this passage whether League members fully believed that this was their mission or simply found it to be a rhetorically effective appeal to make to the public, still steeped in separate spheres ideology, but I can tell that they were willing to be associated with that version of feminism. The second float idea worth looking at "was to represent the idea that 'Trade Unions make the law of Brotherhood a living Truth among the Nations,' Women representing all nations should take part in this" (Reel 1 0475). In this case, it is interesting from a twenty-first century perspective to see them using a woman-only group to illustrate brotherhood rather than sisterhood, though it may not have seemed at all strange for them, but it is more important to note their claim that these bonds transcended cultural lines.

Suffrage Campaign

Finally, I turn to their work for suffrage during these early years. For the sake of organization, I have divided their efforts for suffrage into three categories: stand for it, listen to it, and work for it. By standing for it, I mean that they made some statement in its favor, with the

best example of it during this time being their October 24, 1907 response to the State Federation of Labor's communication "urging the League to support the labor candidates for judges of the Supreme Court. The Secretary was instructed to reply to the letter stating that if the trade unionists who were interested in politics would use their influence to secure for trade union women, and other women interested in the organization of labor a right to the ballot, that the Women's Trade Union League would be in a position to back the labor candidates effectively" (Reel 1 0245). While I adore the snarky-ness of this reply, it was a stand for suffrage that really accomplished little, beyond potentially alienating the League from the SFL.

Similarly, the League was often willing to listen to presentations on women's need for the ballot without necessarily accomplishing much for the cause, as when they allowed on May 4, 1908 two references to suffrage work: "Mrs. Blatch made a short address on 'What women can do with the ballot'. Mrs. Borman Wells spoke on the open air meetings and urged the value of the ballot, saying, that it would be a greater social benefit of women than even trade union organization. She also extended an invitation to the members of the league to an afternoon at home, also to open discussion Tuesday evenings at the Progressive Women Suffrage Union" (Reel 1 0325). Again, on December 22, 1908, they let an announcement be made regarding an upcoming debate on "Is the wife supported by her Husband" (Reel 1 0396) without giving the movement more than implied sanction.

The League did record some more concerted efforts towards gaining suffrage during this time, however, though it's clear that most of their efforts were spear-headed by two members in particular who were highly committed to suffrage work: Leonora O'Reilly and Harriet Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. To illustrate, in February of 1908, Blatch

“announced that a delegation of the Suffrage Association would be given a hearing at Albany and that it was desirable that as many attend the hearing as possible. A motion was carried that the league send a representative” (Reel 1 0301) and on November 2, 1908, she requested that members “distribute suffrage literature at the booths on election day” (Reel 1 0381). Similarly, we see in March of 1909 that “Miss O’Reilly reported that she had attended the Suffrage Hearing at Albany and had spoken from the working woman’s point of view . . . She had spoken in Boston at a large meeting on ‘Votes for Women’” (Reel 1 0431-0432). There is evidence in the record, nevertheless, that more of the members were becoming concerned about gaining suffrage, with an April of 1909 claim that “the League is realizing the increasing necessity of including working-women in the suffrage movement” (Reel 1 0447) and a September of 1909 vote to send a deputation to demand municipal suffrage (Reel 1 0498). Additionally, they report on November 17, 1909 that “since the meeting of the League it was found that it would be possible to hold in conjunction with the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women a reception to Mrs. Pankhurst [a prominent British suffrage proponent] . . . Eleven hundred invitations have been issued to the reception to Mrs. Pankhurst by the Equality League and four hundred by our League” (Reel 1 0520). We see a bit of the League’s rationale for this involvement in their 1907-1908 Annual Report where they note in regard to a “National Convention of Women Unionists” that they had passed an endorsement of suffrage “particularly on the ground of the recent decision in New York declaring limitation of night work for women, illegal” (Reel 22 0010). As the League became more aware of the role of legislation in their fight to improve the lives of working women, having the vote became more desirable.

The Glory Days: 1909-1913

Women as Leaders

During the revolution in the garment trades years, we see a proliferation of examples of women either in leadership roles or the League maneuvering to get them there. For example, on September 21, 1910, we find the League responding to a member's statement that "there would be no woman delegate to the [Textile Workers'] convention sent from their Local since the women were not allowed a vote in the men's local. The women members paid per capita to the A.F. of L. and shared the expenses of the local, but have no vote." The League "decided to investigate this situation when the local applied for affiliation with the League, which it will do shortly" and also recommended that the Label Committee investigate to determine whether or not the Textile Workers Label ought to be on the products made in the factories represented by this woman's union, determining "whether the women workers are organized and are bonafide voting members" (Reel 1 0614). This interest clearly demonstrates the League's commitment to empowering women within unions. Similarly, in March of 1911, a member named Mrs. Lavine spoke to the League about her efforts to "get the co-operation of the National and Local Unions in admitting the women hand buttonhole makers and finishers to membership and that she had been unsuccessful." The reason was that "she was not admitted to the floor of any Local Union as she held no union card and she therefore, requested that the Women's Trade Union League endorse her and send a committee with her to the United Garment Workers to demand the recognition of the Buttonhole Makers and Finishers. A motion was carried that a committee be appointed to investigate the situation and that Mrs Lavine should go with them" (Reel 1 0712). In this case, it is quite clear how sisterhood could be valued over class solidarity when the male

unionists seemed bent on setting up such impossible obstacles in the way of women wishing to organize.

Indeed, this issue played a role in Helen Marot's distaste for East Side organizations, as she cites in May of 1911 their "want of confidence in the women and the women's lack of confidence in themselves" as one of the reasons for the failure of their unions, going on to point out that one of the weaknesses in the League's efforts to reform them actually arose out of them having one of their members, Rose Schneiderman, on the Executive Board of the Waist Makers union. She claims that "we are constantly told when we make complaints in regard to methods that Miss Schneiderman is on the Board and can make the fight and her presence there makes us more or less responsible for conditions. I would therefore recommend that Miss Schneiderman be requested to withdraw and that we centre our efforts on the American girls working in the waist shops" (Reel 1 0769). While we can argue over the sincerity of Marot's stated position versus the prejudices she may have harbored against the Jewish workers she was so determined to turn away from, it is interesting to consider that, in this instance, she would cite having a woman in a position of leadership as a liability rather than a desired end, implying that it would be more effective in this case to lobby for change from the outside rather than the inside. This is in marked comparison to the obvious aim of wanting to gain suffrage so that women could influence the political process directly, rather than from the outside as had long been the only option for women interested in changing the political landscape. Although, the bigger issue for Schneiderman's ineffectiveness was likely that she was only one voice among many, and likely to have been an undervalued one at that, due to her gender.

In general, however, the League was supportive of women as leaders. They recorded what they termed a “stirring address” from Margaret Dreier Robins, President of the National WTUL in July of 1911, in which she declared “in every workshop of say thirty girls there is undreamed of initiative and capacity for social leadership and control, unknown wealth of intellectual and moral resource. The union brings into exercise these powers and uses them for the benefit of the group thus stimulating and increasing the individual and group life” (Reel 1 0802-0803). When a representative of the Ladies Garment Workers, Mr. Elstein, approached the League to gain their support for a general strike among the White Goods Workers in August of 1912, a League officer called him out, explaining that “the business of the League was to bring women into places of responsibility in the organization of their trade; that we knew and he knew if we should now work even with representatives in a general strike that the union would be carried on and controlled by the men, and the women would have no place and power, and probably mostly no voice. He agreed that all of this was true, but his conception of the League’s place in the labor movement was quite different from mine” (Reel 1 1031-1032). Again, we see here clear evidence of why the League would be inclined to invoke sisterhood over class solidarity and also the great value they placed on training women up to larger leadership roles by first putting them in charge of the daily affairs of their organizations.

When a woman gained a position of power, the League was happy to record the event, as they did on April 25, 1912, noting that “Mrs Sullivan announced that for the first time a woman delegate from their Local had been elected to represent them at their convention” (Reel 1 0968). When women failed to do so, the League was likely to intervene, as they did in January of 1913 when President Taft didn’t appoint any women to the Industrial Relations Committee and the

League protested. It is noteworthy how they landed on their exact protest, with it first “regularly moved and seconded that the matter be referred to the National Executive Board objecting to the appointments on the ground that no women were appointed and no one representing the interests and welfare of labor in the country,” but then it was amended “that the matter be referred to the National Executive Board with the request from the New York League that the National protest against the non-appointment of a woman on the Commission. The amendment was carried” (Reel 2 0006-0007). They began with a protest that was equal parts gender- and class-based, but then decided to only object on the grounds of gender. Again, this could be motivated by many factors, perhaps by the realization that there was, in fact, an excellent representative of labor interests on the commission, but the emphasis in the minutes is not on the other factors but simply on the fact that sisterhood won out as the most important issue to be defended.

Of course, when in June of 1913 the League reported that President Wilson was “contemplating appointing Mrs. J.B. Harriman as a member of the Industrial Commission” they responded with the following resolution, to be sent to the president and members of the Senate:

WHEREAS: 8,000,000 women are now factors in industry and have entered 295 of the 303 trades and occupations listed, and the industrial conditions under which girls and women are forced to work are an individual and social menace and working women are continually used to lower the wage standards of men, be it,

RESOLVED: That the Women’s Trade Union League of New York urge President Wilson to appoint a *working woman* on the Industrial Commission representing the organized working women of America. (Reel 2 0094-0095) [emphasis mine]

Sisterhood was the main thing, except when it wasn't, and in this case, they wanted more than just a woman on the Commission: they wanted a woman with appropriate experience who would be able to promote the specific concerns of working women. They were pleased to report the following month that their resolution had been sent and responded to "to the effect that the matter would receive consideration" (Reel 2 0107). In the case of the State Industrial Board, the League went a step further suggesting that they would "submit the name of Miss Schneiderman or other labor women as candidates for the position, after discovering from Miss Dreier whether she as a Commissioner had made other recommendations" (Reel 2 0060-0061). This was in keeping with their October of 1911 motion that "if such appointments [in this case for Factory Inspector] are open and the League has opportunity for placing any one that the preference be given to the trade union members. Carried" (Reel 1 0853).

Another area of interest for female leadership during this time is found in the League's interactions with various women doctors. I was surprised by the way they seemed to take for granted that they would be working with women in this field, making no mention of supporting them specifically because they were women, yet nevertheless hiring women physicians both for giving lectures and serving as the primary physician for seeing members of the Good Health League that they ran for a time for their members. To illustrate, we find the following discussion in November of 1912:

Mrs Elliot reported that she and the Secretary had seen Dr. Mann, Dr. Birdwell, and Dr. Morton on the question of Lectures on Hygiene; . . . Dr. Mann was not in a position to give lectures herself and Dr. Birdwell said he would send the names of possible lecturers. Dr. Horton outlined a very interesting course of lectures which covered the ground so far

as such material was concerned. It was a question in the mind of Mrs Elliot and the Secretary whether Dr. Horton was in every way the right person, but she was so far the only available person to date and was willing to give lectures to the League for \$25.00 a lecture. (Reel 1 1085-1086)

While they do show some doubts as to the fitness of Dr. Horton for giving these lectures, it seems important that two of the three physicians they would be considering would be women when that was not the general ration of practicing physicians in the country at the time. When they were ready to hire a physician for the Good Health League, they went with a Dr. Florence Laighton in December of 1912 (Reel 1 1094-1095) and then mentioned a course of health lectures offered by a Dr. Rosalie Slaughter Morton (incidentally, a *terrible* name for a physician) the following December (Reel 2 0182). I mention these examples primarily because they illustrate how the League practiced what they preached in terms of seeking women in leadership roles traditionally reserved for men in other aspects of their dealings beyond just trade unions.

Relationships Among and Understanding of Women

As for their dealings with trade union women, I need to turn our attention once more to the ways that the League managed to foster sisterhood across class lines during this time period by looking at their relationships with working women. Hospitality continued to be a common trope employed by League members as they thought about how they could draw working women into their ranks. For example, in May of 1909:

Miss Schneiderman reported that the Dressmakers meet every Monday night at the League headquarters. She said that the girls were delighted to have a house to meet in, and that the interest of those who were attending was greater than it had been before. She

felt that the foundation of the Union was growing in strength. The girls were anxious to make use of the library. Miss Schneiderman was instructed to loan the books.

The Union has arranged for a strawberry festival to be held at the League headquarters the 12th, of June. It was the sense of the board that the Dressmakers should not be charged for meeting at the League until they were relieved of their rent at Clinton Hall.” (Reel 1 0455)

As in the early organization days, the League was hesitant to charge fledgling groups for the use of League headquarters lest they become discouraged. Similarly, the League continued to plan social engagements for groups of workers to try to cultivate a relationship with them, with moderate success. On January 18, 1911, for example we find the mixed description that “Miss Dreier reported that the social evening that she had given to the White Goods Workers had been successful to the point of enjoyment and development of relationship between those present, but that there were a few who came, which was due to bad weather” (Reel 1 0678). Another form of this hospitality was announced at the February 5, 1912 meeting of the League when the President stated “that a friend had offered to back financially a summer Vacation House for trade union women” and “a motion was carried that a conference of the trade union women be called for Thursday evening at 6.P.M. February 15th” (Reel 1 0935), presumably to decide whether or not they wished to accept such a gesture of hospitality.

This particular manifestation of sisterhood through hospitality began to break down in the later portion of this period, however. One of the first indications of this came when the chairman of the Educational Bureau announced in March of 1913 that a woman had been engaged to give ten calisthenic lessons to thirty girls who had asked for them, at a cost of \$25.00. There followed

“discussion on whether or not the girls should be asked to pay 10 cents a lesson; or whether the League should be asked to give the lessons free. Discussion also as to whether the work would help in bringing trade union girls to the League. A motion was carried that Mrs Elliot be authorized to spend \$25.00 on the lessons and to find out if it would be possible for the girls to pay for the lessons or get them to join the Good Health League” (Reel 2 0042-0043). It would appear that the League would be willing to cover the cost of the lessons if they felt that by doing so they would be forwarding the goal of organizing and recruiting working women, but not if the lessons wouldn’t do that. The problem was that they weren’t sure which was the case. The biggest affront to their position of hospitality, however, came when they began to accede to the “action taken at the National Convention in regard to trade union members paying \$1.00 a year dues.” When they discussed the proposition in June of 1913, “the President suggested that the proposition be brought up in the Autumn” (Reel 2 0101), delaying the end of hospitality through free membership that the League had hitherto offered, but when the matter was brought up again that November, the Executive Board voted to recommend to the League that trade union members be charged \$1.00 per year in dues (Reel 2 0173-0174). At the December meeting of the League, “the matter in regard to the trade union members paying dues was fully discussed and the consensus of opinion was that the trade union members be asked to pay dues” (Reel 2 0184).

Then again, the League also offered during this time a most striking example of sisterly hospitality toward the women touched by the great strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. In February, “Miss O’Reilly also announced that arrangements were being made to bring the babies belonging to some of the Lawrence strikers to New York during the time of the strike and that if any member of the League would take care of a baby to send their names to Leonora

O'Reilly" (Reel 1 0935). Now, as the current mother of an infant, this particular story stuck out to me as an extraordinary step of faith and statement of sisterhood, both to trust these unknown women with ones child and for those women to take on the full-time care of someone else's baby. When League representatives could have voted to send the children away in March, they voted the proposition down (Reel 1 0948), and when that same night they were informed that "there was still 209 children in New York; that while they had been cared for wonderfully by most of the families there were some who could not supply the clothing they needed that the majority of the children had come to New York insufficiently clad that they had needed medical treatment" the League responded by taking up an immediate "collection of \$11.00 plus" and also gave the "names of people who might give clothing or would care for the children" (Reel 1 0949). Certainly, this reinforces the idea that motherhood is an important part of the League's understanding of feminism and the role of women.

Another aspect of the League's relationship with working women during this time teetered on the edge of exploitative. They noted in March of 1911 that "in supporting the bill, limiting the hours of women and minors in New York State to 54 hours per week, a member of the committee appeared with five other women representing different trades at the hearing before the Assembly Committee, and spoke for the measure. It was generally considered a most effective method of influencing the legislators, and hereafter whenever possible we will follow this policy" (Reel 1 0722). On the one hand, if the women genuinely desired these laws to pass, giving them the opportunity to speak for them is empowering. If, on the other hand, it's the League members who have decided these measures will be good for them and they go out looking for a few token workers to support their position, the practice could be problematic, as

we shall see in the next time period. At any rate, they did put this method into practice, stating in November of 1911 that the Legislative Committee “was arranging with trade union women to appear before the Factory Investigation Commission to voice their desire for legislation on; The minimum wage; 48 hour week; pensions for pregnant women; insurance for mothers and certain fire protection” (Reel 1 0863). I question which came first, the League’s desire for hours legislation or the working women’s, because it is not until February of 1912 that an official discussion of the 48 Hour law is discussed in a general League meeting, even though they had found trade union women to speak in favor of it the previous November. The consensus, at least as recorded, was that the League should support the laws and conduct a statewide campaign to “force before the workers the immediate importance of organization in case of State enactment of a short hour law and the employers in consequence reduced wages as they had been reduced in Lawrence” (Reel 1 0932-0933), as discussed in relation to their campaign with illustrated lectures. Perhaps this tendency to believe that sisterhood entitles them to speak up proactively for working women is not so surprising here when we consider that they were already doing so in 1910, with the Secretary reporting that April that “at the request of the Academy of Political Science I have been giving some time to writing up an account of the Shirt Waist Makers Strike. Instead of presenting the strike from the economic point of view, as they are usually presented in economic journals I have tried to give a picture of the motive forces of women in unorganized trades during a strike” (Reel 1 0568). It may well be that Helen Marot’s experience working with the strikers enabled her to give a fair presentation of their thought process, but to do that successfully, both she and the strikers needed to believe that sisterhood was possible across class divides in order to open up to one another.

Of course, they also invoked sisterhood to deal with other divides, such as race, as in that very same report from April of 1910, Marot discusses her efforts at job placement for several women. She describes the situation as follows:

The work of trying to place colored girls in factories has resulted in placing no one, but in giving us an understanding of the situation. After I found that girl after girl failed to secure a position I tested the situation by getting the name of the factory directly from the union and sending a girl there, when she reported back that they would not take her I called up the factory and received the reply that they still wanted workers, but did not want colored girls, they excused themselves on the ground that the other girls would not work with them. I had proven positively, through Mrs. Smith, who was doing some investigating, that there was actually no prejudice amongst the girls against the colored girls, and that the prejudice is on the side of the employers. (Reel 1 0568)

In this case, it seems clear that sisterhood is conquering racial divides, both within the League and among the workers, but the triple divide of class, race, and gender between the potential employers and these women workers was just too much to overcome. Comparing this example to the previous one, it is clear that emphasizing sisterhood could be very effective for bringing various groups of women together, but the complex nature of the many factors that divided them not only from each other but from those in positions of power meant that sisterhood alone might not be enough to implement meaningful change.

This could be seen in their attempts to invoke sisterhood with middle- and upper-class women as well. League members were frequently asked to speak before women's clubs and other assemblies, such as "the Joint Meeting of Mrs. Simkhovitch's classes at Barnard and the

School of Philanthropy (Reel 1 0718), speaking about the needs and organization of wage-earning women in an attempt to both educate and garner financial support. Despite being asked so frequently, however, they were not always able to bring these women into the sisterhood fold. For example, in early 1911, Helen Marot reports that “on February 6th, in answer to an engagement of ten months I spoke before the Unitarian Alliance of Women, on ‘Women’s Trade Unions’. I was not at all equal to the task of reaching the women and feel my time would have been very much better employed in organization work” (Ree 1 0681). In this case, she takes the blame on herself for not being able to hit on the right rhetorical move to reach these women, but that is much the same as saying that they didn’t believe in sisterhood across class lines, so she would rather work with wage-earning women who do.

Within the League itself, several methods were employed to try to foster sisterhood. The first was to get the members interacting with one another socially. In July of 1910, members were invited to Leonora O’Reilly’s house for a trip to the beach and then dinner afterwards (Reel 1 0603). In July of 1911 they planned to hold their next meeting in Mary Dreier’s garden (Reel 1 0801). In November of 1912, we get a report of a most successful Halloween party, with some 90 persons in attendance (Reel 1 1078) and the following year the record states that “the Hallowe’ren Party was a great success. Everybody who came had a jolly good time. Those who did not come don’t know the good time they missed,” this time with more than 75 persons present (Reel 2 0166). As other entertainments came and went, the Halloween party became a staple for League members, and a costume party seems quite fitting for a group who devoted so much effort into crafting their image. They also devoted part of a May of 1913 meeting to “sociability and opportunity given the members to meet the President. Mrs Elliot Miss Weinstein a member of the

Waist Makers Union and Miss Lillian Lambert the daughter of a Member of the Musical Mutual Protective Union furnished the musical program of the evening. Refreshments were served and the evening closed with dancing” (Reel 2 0066), and they reported “a successful Beach Party” in September of 1913, with 14 girls spending “a delightful afternoon at Coney Island and accept[ing] Miss O’Reilly’s invitation to supper where a pleasant evening was spent” (Reel 2 0130-0131). Additionally, they introduced Saturday afternoon “At Homes” at League headquarters in October of that year where League officers could entertain trade union women and other members who dropped by for tea (Reel 2 0157).

The second approach the League took to promote sisterhood among its ranks involved trying to get more members actively involved in the work of the League. In December of 1910, for instance, the League decided to create an Organization Auxiliary that would both act as a means of educating more members on how to conduct organization work and provide them with opportunities to exercise that newfound knowledge (Reel 1 0652-0653). In January of 1911, they mapped out planned lectures and made a call for auxiliary members to act as pickets for unions on strike, particularly the Shirt Waist Makers (Reel 1 0672), but by March 15, 1911, Helen Marot was lambasting the effort, stating that “we have made constant appeals both by letter and through the bulletin but our members have not answered. Miss Scott is in need of people to visit individual girls. I think our experiment with the Organization Auxiliary for three months had made it quite clear that we cannot depend upon our members supplementing the serious and heavy work of the organizers” (Reel 1 0717). She was still complaining in January of 1912 that “the League has in the past used its workers and its members for its necessary needs irrespective of qualifications. If the League is to meet the issues and opportunities which are coming before it

it cannot afford to waste the ability of the members nor can it afford to give members work who are not especially fitted for it” (Reel 1 0921-0922). Her complaints had little effect, apparently, though, since in October of 1912, Rose Schneiderman was lamenting that “she had received very few promises of co-operation from members of the League. She had asked Miss Smith of the Italian Committee if she could help in calling mass meetings, but had had no final answer” (Reel 1 1067), but it wasn’t until September of 1913 that the League again attempted to create a committee to help get more members involved in their work. This time, they called it an Organization Committee in accordance to the recommendations of the National WTUL, with the plan that two thirds of the membership of the committee would be trade unionists and:

the business of this Committee will be to co-operate with the Chairman in organization; in the distribution of literature; in helping with mass meetings; in lectures to the unions on organization; in conferring with individual groups of girls in regard to organization; in working with shop meetings and generally to co-operate with girls in their various unions. Instead of an Italian Committee we should have several members who speak Italian on this Organization Committee and in this way help the Italian women. (Reel 2 0144-0145)

As before, however, they quickly ran into problems, as Melinda Scott noted in October that “the Committee was composed of people who could not do any active work, with the exception of the group of regular workers” (Reel 2 0158). Despite their best efforts, then, the League struggled to get members to act out their postures of sisterhood through much sustained work, though as we saw in previous chapters, they did often turn out in force during major events like the Shirtwaist Makers’ general strike.

As for the hired workers and elected officers of the League, they provide a different and wide-ranging picture of sisterhood within the League. On the positive side, the record notes several unanimous decisions in filling offices, as when Melinda Scott was elected General Organizer of the League in March of 1912 (Reel 1 0956), and when Mary Dreier sent word in January of 1913 that she “was prevented from attending the League meeting and would be prevented from attending future meetings on account of illness,” the League responded most compassionately, sending “a letter expressing the League’s sympathy in her illness and their regret that it was necessary for her to be absent” (Reel 2 0008). In February of 1912 when one of their office workers stepped down, the League gave a most positive and coalition-affirming account of the event, stating:

It is with regret that I have to report that we have made a change in the office force. It became evident to Miss Parks, as well as to the League that she was better fitted for doing speaking and general agitation work rather than office work; it was impossible for the League to give her this opportunity as they needed all her time in the office, for which work originally employed. Miss Parks expects to get a good position in New York and will be glad to work as one of the members of the League. (Reel 1 0942-0943)

Again, when Helen Marot stepped down as League Secretary in April of 1913, the League responded with regret “that they could not retain her. With words of appreciation of her work Miss Scott in the name of the League presented Miss Marot with a beautiful bouquet of roses.” For her part, Marot was quick to ascribe her decision to the sisterly convictions she “had always stood for which was that the women who had come into the trade union movement through the

industrial struggle were those who should fill the office of labor organizations” (Reel 2 0054-0055).

It was not all sisterly love and roses, however, as is best illustrated by another of my favorite sequences in the record, which I see in my head as a film starring Emma Stone. On July 27, 1911, “the President reported that Sarah Lurie Ostrow had reported that she would leave the League permanently. The President had requested her to stay another month to allow Miss Bean to take her vacation but she refused; saying that her family would not allow her” (Reel 1 0821). Clearly, they were hoping to appeal to her sense of sisterhood with her co-workers, considering their needs and the position in which she was leaving the League with her sudden departure, but her first loyalty, one might say quite naturally, was to her own family. The League reacted to this act of disloyalty to them as follows: “moved by Miss Lemlich seconded by Mrs Heaffely that the President write to Mrs Ostrow; that since she had left the employ of the League that the Executive Board had decided that there was no more money due her and that they would appreciate her returning the typewriter which is the property of the League. CARRIED” (Reel 1 0821). Fine. You don’t want to work for us, we owe you nothing. Of course, Mrs. Ostrow didn’t agree, so we find on September 28, 1911 that “Miss Marot also reported that Mrs. Ostrow, formerly engaged by the League had applied to the Bookkeepers Stenographers, and Accountants’ Union to interest them in her behalf and secure from the Women’s Trade Union League the two weeks’ salary which she felt was due her” (Reel 1 0837). How embarrassing for the League to be accused of just the sort of workplace injustice that they are supposedly working to end. The union, however, “had corresponded with the League and had decided that the League

was not indebted to Mrs. Ostrow but had fully paid her all that was due her” (Reel 1 0837).

That’s not the end of the story, though. On October 26, 1911, we see that:

We have put in a claim of \$35.00 for the broken typewriter which Mrs Ostrow sent back, but we have found that the receipt which they gave to the sender had written on it O.R.B. which on explanation from the Company means ‘sent at owners risk’, Miss Parks has taken the matter up with Miss Rembaugh who explained that the machine was sent at owners risk, providing that Mrs Ostrow knew that the initials were put on the case, but otherwise if that had not been the understanding. Miss Parks has written to Mrs Ostrow but has received no reply. (Reel 1 0847)

How I long to know whether Mrs. Ostrow broke that typewriter on purpose before sending it or merely wrote those initials on the package in a passive-aggressive hope that damage would result! At any rate, this shows that sisterhood was not universally felt among the League’s paid employees, and the indignation they betrayed when one of them failed to live up to their ideal of sisterhood led to further estrangement, in that she did not respond to their letter, though it is also worth noting that my personal suspicion that the damage was intentional does not appear by the record to have been shared by League members.

The last example of sisterhood within the League that I want to examine for this time period is similar in nature. By now, we should all be pretty uniformly convinced that Elizabeth Dutcher was a menace to all attempts at achieving drama-free coalition, but I need to look at another proof of it. On October 7, 1912, we find the following excerpt, which we will read at length and then unpack:

Miss Dutcher reviewed the work of the Label Committee beginning with Miss Samuel's administration. She said that the League had given the Label Committee very little encouragement and had regarded its work rather slightly. She thought the Label Committee an important part of the League and that it had not served its function in having organized a Label Shop and the Central Union Label Council, but that it was necessary to have a committee to keep the matter of the Label before the League members. The Label Committee also gave the allies of the League an opportunity to come in touch with the labor movement and a chance to show their devotion.

Considerable discussion followed Miss Dutcher's remarks and the question of abandoning the Label Committee was not considered. (Reel 1 1064)

Leaving aside her accusations, which frankly cannot be sustained based on what I've seen in the record though it is, I suppose, quite possible that other members groaned and rolled their eyes every time she stood up to speak without the Secretary ever feeling the need to write that down, let's focus on the purpose she saw for the Label Committee — giving “the allies an opportunity to come in touch with the labor movement and a chance to show their devotion.” In other words, Dutcher sees working for the union label as a means for middle- and upper-class members to demonstrate in their daily lives, through the purchases they make, that they are living up to the spirit of sisterhood inspired by the labor movement. By that token, had the League discontinued their label work at that time, they would have been betraying that they didn't believe that allies were as capable of sisterhood as trade unionists. By framing it as such, Dutcher basically guaranteed that her Committee would continue to be supported by the League, though as we saw

in the last chapter, after Dutcher had left and her replacement stepped down, the Label Committee was, in fact, disbanded.

I turn now to an examination of the evidence that League members believed that there were differences between men and women that made sisterhood both possible and necessary. In July of 1911, we get the report that a representative of a Brooklyn Tailors' Union had come to the League seeking their help in organizing dressmakers. While they record that he was disappointed to find that the League could not offer much in the way of financial support, they did send two representatives to one of their meetings, where Marot reports that "Miss Lemlich spoke in Jewish . . . The men as usual did a great deal of unnecessary talking and the girls were listless and uninterested, which was natural as the subjects were not vital, they listened very intently to Miss Lemlich's speech and were eager for our co-operation" (Reel 1 0815). In addition to the growing evidence that Marot was clearly prejudiced against Jewish men, we find a positive assessment of the League's ability to sense what is a vital subject for women workers in a way that men simply can't, lending support to the idea that both gender differences and sisterhood are real. This should not lead us to believe that League members were "man-haters," however. Indeed, one of the best illustrations of their sense of sisterhood and the value of women in the workplace came in a glowing eulogy they wrote to honor one of their male members who passed in September of 1912, William Mailly. It stated in part that:

In the death of William Mailly the Women's Trade Union League has lost a member who believed that the organization of working women was of second importance to no other movement, he believed it to be of as great importance to working men as working women. He appreciated as few men appreciated that women's participation in public

affairs is of vital importance to society. His work with the members of the League and with the women of the Waist Makers Union was an evidence not only of his regard for the working women's movement, but his belief in women's equality with men. (Reel 1 1042-1043)

They espouse a belief in the equality of men and women, with the uplift of women happening not at the expense of working men, but to their benefit.

The equality they mentioned did not, however, entail identity in physical ability, as is clearly evidenced in the reports of two physicians that they include in the record for January 8, 1912. The statements had been made to a government commission looking into the need for legal limits on the number of hours that women could work per week. While their testimony was expedient, it was hardly flattering. When asked whether it was feasible to prevent women from working immediately before and after childbirth, Dr. Woods Hutchinson replied that "it is not only feasible but absolutely necessary. Between two fifths and three fifths of all the deaths of children under one year of age are due to the fact that they are born half starved on account of their mothers having been subject to the double strain of supporting the new life and earning a wage at long hours under bad conditions" (Reel 1 0916). When asked the same question, Dr. Coler stated that "No pregnant woman should be employed under any consideration," that they should be provided a pension because "we certainly wd not work a cow with a calf, and I do not know why we should work a woman when she is with child" (Reel 1 0917). Now, they both also stated agreement with the League's attempts to reduce the number of hours that women worked, but the nature of their views of the effect of maternity on women's abilities presents a rather mixed bag that is in keeping with the overall legacy of claiming gender equality and difference at

the same time. The belief in difference, however, also opened doors for the League to become more involved in some aspects of the labor movement, such as when Jacob Hilquitt, a union representative, sought out the League's help in October of 1913 in "obtaining evidence from some union girls which could be obtained better by a committee of women than by men" (Reel 2 0154). They did also push back against the employment gender segregation, noting in their 1909-1910 Annual Report that "considerable work is being done by this Committee in co-operation with the Investigating Committee of the National Women's Trade Union League. This includes a study of the occupations of women, with a view to finding new occupations or directing women from overcrowded trades into new lines of industry" (Reel 22 0057).

This didn't mean that they were exempt from discriminating based on gender themselves, however, as was pointed out to them in February of 1912. It was called to the attention of the board at that meeting that the League's male organizer, Mr. Caroti, "had been paid on the basis of \$25.00 per week and the Secretary had been paid on the basis of \$100.00 per month." This was, as Miss Pike, the accuser, noted, "a clear discrimination against equal pay for men and women" and she therefore "moved that the League refund the Secretary the sum of money which would put her on an equal basis with Mr. Caroti during his term of employment." That motion was lost, but the League did agree to pay the Secretary on the basis of \$25.00 per week from that day forward (Reel 1 0940-0941). It was, after all, rather difficult to always practice what one preached. Similarly, in July of 1911, we find the League struggling with the idea of having a man, Mr. Caroti again, as one of their three representatives on the Leather Workers Strike Committee. The somewhat equivocal statement of Melinda Scott was that "she did not object to Mr. Caroti being on the Committee, but she thought it should be a Committee of women

representing the League. However, Mr. Caroti being a trade unionist and understanding the Jewish language and with his experience she thought it wise to put him on the Committee” (Reel 1 0812). Essentially, they want women to lead and to be treated with respect and dignity, but they are occasionally willing to compromise complete sisterhood in the hopes that they will, by doing so, be able to make some small stride towards that goal down the road.

Suffrage Campaign

I turn now to what the League was doing for suffrage during this period, as what better way to encourage sisterhood than to work together to remedy this one, great inequality perpetrated against all American women. At this point, the League did work more for suffrage than they had in the last section, but they still had some reservations about it. As a result, the three divisions of this period are a bit different from the last: love to, but can't; work for it; and what you're doing wrong. The first division deals with instances where the League shows a definite inclination for supporting suffrage, but declines active work, the second outlines what they did do, and the third illustrates some of the reservations they felt about aligning themselves with the larger woman movement based on that movement's failure to live up to some of the standards of the labor movement.

Love to, but can't

Our first example in this category appears in the record for October 19, 1910, when Harriet Stanton Blatch “spoke on the advisability of the League starting a suffrage movement among the women workers” and “general discussion followed” (Reel 1 0630). The result of that discussion was a motion that the League “indorse the suffrage movement, but feel unable to do any work for it” (Reel 1 0632). While one wonders what exactly would be accomplished by an

endorsement unaccompanied by any action, it is clear that the League believed it was still a meaningful gesture of solidarity with an important cause that simply lay outside of the scope of their work. In June of 1912, we see the reluctance of the League to let suffrage work detract from their other activities when Leonora O'Reilly "asked if the Wage Earner's Suffrage League might have the use of the Assembly Room Monday evening July 8th" and the League's answer was that she could use it "if it was not engaged" though they "suggested that it would not be a good time for a meeting as the next evening Karl Legien was to speak at the League" (Reel 1 1012). They did, however, approve in September the Wage Earner's League being "given the use of the Assembly Room once a month for the next three months" (Reel 1 1056), though it hardly seemed a free gift, as O'Reilly felt compelled the following month to "thank[] the League for the loan of the Assembly Room for the At Home Oct. 20th. She stated that the Wage Earner's League had bought \$5.00 worth of ball tickets and announced that an At Home of the Wage Earner's League would be held in connection with the Women's Trade Union League November 17th" (Reel 1 1069-1070). The final example of this sort of interaction with suffrage work was recorded on January 5, 1913, when we find that:

a request came from the Woman Suffrage Party 25th Assembly District that the League co-operate with them in holding a meeting in this District. An invitation was extended to the 25th Assembly District to send a speaker to the January meeting of the League. After a good deal of delay the leader of the District wrote that it would be impossible for them to co-operate with the League at this time as they had a business meeting that evening. It was too late however to get anyone else as the notices had to be sent out. (Reel 2 0001)

In this case, they were asked for cooperation in setting up a meeting, but only offered a portion of their already scheduled meeting for a speaker. When the Suffrage Party couldn't abide exactly by their terms, they made no further effort to cooperate with them, at least, not until November of 1913, when they again tried to set up an evening for them to speak at a League meeting (Reel 2 0171-0172).

Work For It

The League did, however, engage in a fair amount of active suffrage work during this time, though the term active may be a bit of an exaggeration for much of it. One of the most documented ways they worked for suffrage was by participating in an annual suffrage parade. In April of 1911, the League voted to take part in the Suffrage Parade of the Woman's Suffrage Party (Reel 1 0734), though the following year, we can see their careful thought about their participation through the following exchange: "Communication read from the Women's Political Union in regard to the Suffrage Parade May 4th. After much discussion it was moved that the League advise its members to parade with the Wage Earners Branch if such a branch is organized, rather than with the W.P.U. The motion was amended; that the League ask its members and unions affiliated to march with the Wage Earners League. Carried." (Reel 1 0906-0907). Clearly, they wanted to support suffrage, but not at the expense of their loyalty to labor. Nevertheless, the Secretary reported in April of 1912 that "On my own responsibility I gave over the May issue of the Bulletin to the Suffrage Parade Committee of the Wage Earner's League reserving the back of the Bulletin for our Calendar" (Reel 1 0961) and O'Reilly made efforts on April 25, 1912 to secure the promise of every member of the Executive Board to march in the suffrage parade. In response, "all the members assured Miss O'Reilly that they

would march and the general sentiment was that it would be best for them to march as a group rather than as marshals” (Reel 1 0971). Indeed, they seemed quite excited over their May 6, 1912 reports that “16 girls took part in the Suffrage parade and carried their Italian banner” (Reel 1 0974), that “nine [CFU] men had pledged to march in the Suffrage Parade” (Reel 1 0975), and that Mary Dreier “was asked to be Chairman at Street meetings held in autos after the Suffrage Parade. Miss O’Reilly, Mrs. Robins and Miss Grace Colbron all spoke and there was a great deal of discussion and interest. The President stated that if there had been more speakers they could have continued the meeting until much later” (Reel 1 0985-0986). They participated once more the following year, with the April 14, 1913 meeting showing that “after discussion,” the League decided to “appoint a Committee to co-operate with the Wage Earner’s League to help make the suffrage parade a success” (Reel 2 0054).

The League also sought to support suffrage by supporting several of their social and fund-raising events. For example, on February 6, 1911, the League agreed to endorse a working women’s mass meeting arranged by the Woman’s Suffrage Party (Reel 1 0696) and they subsequently rented two boxes at Carnegie Hall to use when attending the meeting (Reel 1 0702). They also urged their members to purchase tickets for the “Votes for Women” ball (Reel 1 0907), and in April of 1912 the Label Committee announced their support through “running a series of articles on the label for one year in ‘The Woman Voter’” (Reel 1 0968). In September of 1912, O’Reilly “appealed to the members to help her Wage Earner’s League at the Vaudeville performance Sunday Sept. 15th. She appealed to all of the girls to bring one hundred members of their union and if they could not bring their members to bring their friends. She gave them one hundred circulars to distribute” (Reel 1 1041-1042). Later that month, the Wage Earner’s League

sent a letter to the Executive Board, “enclosing speeches by trade union women and rates for same.” Initially, the board was just going to give them permission to sell the speeches at League meetings, but then, “motion amended that the League purchase \$2.50 worth of speeches. Carried” (Reel 1 1054). The last example of this sort of support came in October of 1913 when the League received a letter “asking that members of the League volunteer to act as ushers at the Pankhurst meeting Oct 21st and announcing that she had tickets for sale” (Reel 2 0148).

Additionally, the League took on some more direct agitation for suffrage through speaking engagements and political activities. The first example of this can be found on November 16, 1910, when Mary Dreier mentions in passing that she had spoken at the New Jersey Suffrage Society (Reel 1 0641). In March of 1912, we hear that the officers had “urged on the legislators the passage of . . . the Suffrage amendment” (Reel 1 0955), which action was endorsed by the League. In December of 1912, the League eagerly listened to “Miss Maud Younger who was present [and] was asked to tell the League members ‘How the Women Won the Vote in California’. Miss Younger’s speech was much enjoyed by all” (Reel 1 1097). Nevertheless, when the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) asked them in March of 1913 to either send a representative before “the Senator or Representative asking him to work for a National Constitutional amendment to enfranchise women, or message be sent to the N.A.W.S.A.” they opted to just send a message to NAWSA (Reel 2 0045). This hesitation toward NAWSA could be seen again that May, when they asked “that the League urge upon the Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage the importance of proposing and reporting favorably an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women” and the League “moved and seconded that a resolution which would harmonize with the work of the League be

drawn up and sent to the members of the Committee. Carried” (Reel 2 0064). They clearly harbored some fear that entering too fully into sisterhood with suffragists would compromise their sisterly connection with labor. They did send the letters, however, in May (Reel 2 0074) and when NAWSA sent them petitions to sign and return in July, they moved and seconded that as many as possible be signed and returned (Reel 2 0106).

Further evidence that they were speaking for suffrage appears in two forms. On the one hand, we have the Secretary reporting in March of 1913 that “Since my trip to Albany and Troy where I gave three lectures I have heard through Miss Stott that both the suffrage club and the labor men of Albany have taken on new life and activity” (Reel 2 0048) and the President noting in November of 1913 that “I was requested to speak at the State Convention of the Woman Suffrage Party in Rochester October 15th on “Working Women’s Need of the Ballot’. There were five thousand people at the meeting and a great many working women who appeared to relish the idea of my telling them of the things we did not want people to do for the working women. The expenses were paid by the Woman Suffrage Party” (Reel 2 0180). In both of these cases, we see the officers emphasizing the fact that what they were doing for suffrage was still in line with their trade union work, in one case noting that labor men as well as suffragists had been enlivened by League influence, and in the other highlighting the presence and appreciation of working women at the event, as well as the fact that no League funds were spent to participate. The other form of speaking for suffrage, however, put the League at odds with labor men. In November of 1912, we find the following: “Letter from the Central Federated Union of New York asking the League’s endorsement of Thomas J. Curtis was read. The Secretary was ordered to write to the C.F.U. stating that the League endorsed no candidates for office and refused to do

so until women had a voice in the government” (Reel 1 1086). Given what we have seen of the League’s tumultuous relationship with the CFU, however, their choice of sisterhood over class solidarity is not so surprising.

What you’re doing wrong

In general, however, the League did take their allegiance to labor very seriously as they negotiated their entrance into suffrage work, which leads us to this last subsection of times when the League felt the need to point out the moral failings of the suffragists, as well as when they felt the need to justify them. For example, in May of 1910, the League was wrestling with “the possibility of having Crystable (*sic*) Pankhurst for the League when visiting America in connection with the League for Political Education. Discussion followed. It was decided that it would not hurt the League as a trade union organization to hold a meeting for the purpose of reimbursing its finances at which Miss Crystable Pankhurst would speak on suffrage in England” (Reel 1 0578). The ideological gymnastics necessary to conclude that such an elitist suffragist could be brought in is rather mind-boggling, but it does show how there was a constant tension for them between coalition based on class or gender. More often, though, the League was inclined to rather self-righteously point out the hypocrisies and failings of others. For instance, On September 21, 1910, Rose Schneiderman “moved that the League send a protest to the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women on account of their advertising and using Fleischman’s yeast at the Pure Food Exhibit at Madison Square Garden, since the organization claimed to be supported by working women and by trade unionists and is not abiding by trade union principles” (Reel 1 0615), and then in November, Helen Marot “offered her resignation as delegate to the League from the Equality League on the ground that as a member of the B.S. &

A.U. she could not continue her connections with the Equality League which refused to unionize its office. A motion was carried that Miss Marot's resignation be accepted and that the League withhold any other delegate while the Equality League takes this position" (Reel 1 0638-0639).

The League also protested against a suffrage group who were presenting a play called either "A Pair of Socks" or "Another Pair of Socks," which one member stated to be "in opposition to trade unions" (Reel 1 0971-0972). After receiving a written explanation of the member's objections to the play, the League decided to send a letter to the State Suffrage League "objecting to the presentation of the play" (Reel 1 0976). In this way, they distanced themselves from these particular sisters, though by sending a letter of protest to them, they were still keeping the lines of communication open, no doubt with the hope that the group would realize their mistake and mend their ways. Finally, the League was quite alarmed when they discovered that one of their members was planning to publish an article entitled "Places where Women's Unions Meet" in "The Woman Voter" and demanded to know what it would contain. She assured them that "the title had been suggested after a talk with Miss McNally who had told of the Labor Temple being thrown open for union meetings and that various Catholic Parish Houses had been given for the same purpose. The article would contain nothing, Miss Davis said, but what would meet with approval" (Reel 1 0988). Through these examples, we gain a better understanding of the tenuous nature of the sisterhood that the League claimed and tried to cultivate as the interests of their working sisters and their suffrage sisters could easily, though certainly not necessarily, be at odds.

Turn to Legislation: 1913-1919

Women as Leaders

In this final time period, I turn once again to the League's stance on women in leadership roles. In June of 1914, we find Mary Dreier requesting that the League "protest against the action taken by the Civil Service Commission of barring women from the examination for supervisors and directors of unemployment bureaus. A motion made that a letter be sent to that effect" (Reel 2 0266). Similarly, in November of 1915, we find the League deciding to send letters to "Fire Commissioner Adamson and the Labor Department urging the appointment of more women inspectors" (Reel 2 0446-0447). When the CFU asked them to send delegates to Albany for a hearing on Compensation Law, the League not only appointed a committee of three to go, but also voted to communicate with "Legislative Agent Henley," asking that "a woman be allowed to speak" (Reel 2 0357). In more specific support of women in leadership positions, the League decided to endorse one of their members to fulfill "a new law in the Labor Department requir[ing] one woman physician and two men" in January of 1914, sending a letter to "Commissioner Lynch saying that Dr. [Fannie] Dembo is well qualified for the position" (Reel 2 0197), and in June of 1915, when the League learned that Melinda Scott's name had been submitted to the Governor on a list of twenty-five from which he was to choose five to appoint on the Advisory Council of the Industrial Commission, the League voted to send a letter to the Governor, "urging the appointment of Miss Scott as member of the Council and to the Central Bodies urging them to endorse a woman as a member of the Council" (Reel 2 0389-0390).

Within the labor movement, the League also continued to push for women to take on more leadership roles. To illustrate, they mention of a group of strikers in October of 1915 that

“we got the girls interested and had them attend meetings and voiced their needs and their demands. The girls had not dreamed that they could ask for anything, they were simply out with the men. We had three girls appointed on the Committee and we opened negotiations with the employer” (Reel 2 0432). As we saw earlier, the League took on a dual stance: requiring that the women actively participate in and guide meetings, but still agreeing to aid them in negotiations with employers. The result of one such encounter with an employer that same month was the following report: “The employer was one of the Divine Right kind of men and believes that they are entitled to rule the lives and the destinies of the people who work for them and it gave me great pleasure to contradict him in lots of things and disagree with him” (Reel 2 0433). This is perhaps more an example of delighting in the exercise of power already attained than of the League fighting for such positions for their members, but hearing such a report in a meeting would surely reinforce sisterhood through a little laughter at the man’s expense. The same brand of humor can be found in the November of 1918 report that “I attended three meetings of the Central Federated Union, and at the last one, had to make a fight in order to have women appointed on committees. It seems that the Chairman never realized that women ought to be appointed on committees, until I called his attention to the fact” (Reel 2 0667). Again, given that it’s the CFU, the snarky-ness is not surprising, though the fact that an employer and a member of a Central Body would receive the same treatment is another indication that sisterhood could trump class solidarity at times.

The League also engaged in efforts to protect working women who were impacted by the end of World War I and the expectation that women would give up their jobs to returning soldiers. In this case, they were fighting not just for women in leadership roles, but for women to

remain in particular trades at all, attempting to safeguard the strides toward gender desegregation in the workplace that had been gained during the war. On September 9, 1918, they appointed a committee “to draw up a plan on reconstruction for working women after the war” that they could present at their national convention (Reel 2 0646-0647). In addition to coming up with their own plans, they also spoke out against the plans of both labor and government bodies that failed to respect the rights and needs of working women. In November of 1918, they sent a representative to the CFU’s Reconstruction Committee, and she “protested against their resolution asking women to leave their jobs” (Reel 2 0665). The following month, they “sent a telegram to the War Labor Board and to the Secretary of Labor, protesting against the Cleveland decision to dismiss women from transportation service, as violation of principle of right of women to work” (Reel 2 0674).

Relationships Among and Understanding of Women

Given these attempts to protect the right of women to work, I turn once more to an examination of the relationships the League maintained or sought with working-class women generally during this time, whether or not they were wage-earners. As I noted in the last time period, the League’s use of hospitality toward working women had begun to break down as they voted to charge dues of a dollar a year from union members. This process continued, with the measure officially adopted on January 5, 1914 (Reel 2 0196), though their subsequent discussions of the measure show that they remained conflicted over the measure. In August of 1914, “the President reported that a number of the trade union members of the League had not paid dues and suggested that the members of the various unions might be able to bring this matter to the attention of their individual members. Moved by Miss Schneiderman seconded by

Mr. Boyle that the matter be referred to the League meeting. Carried. Moved by Mrs Wise seconded by Miss Schneiderman that no applications for membership in the League be accepted unless accompanied by the dues. Carried” (Reel 2 0279). We see here that the Board wanted to collect unpaid dues, but they were hesitant about imposing the measure from above, deciding instead to bring it up at the general meeting where any decisions made could be argued were a representation of the desires of the entire group rather than a small subset. They did see fit, however, to mandate that no new members would be accepted without an upfront payment of dues. The result of presenting the matter to the League in October was the forming of an all trade union member committee “to take up the matter of members of trade unions who have not paid dues since the Treasurer sent Bills out March 1914” (Reel 2 0291). In November, we find that several members had “paid up their dues” (Reel 2 0306), but the committee was still meeting and strategizing to collect dues in February of 1915, deciding that “it would be better to write letters to all members who were in arrears in their dues asking them if they desire to continue their membership in the League” (Reel 2 0340). More importantly for the illustration of the League’s ambivalence towards this move, however, was the discussion that followed “on suspending dues for members who are unemployed. Moved and seconded that members be notified they will not be dropped from membership for non-payment of dues if unemployed. Carried” (Reel 2 0340). At any rate, the problem did seem to be widespread within the League, with the Secretary reporting that they sent out 106 letters for nonpayment of dues in February of 1915 (Reel 2 0348). However effective those letters may have been, the matter was addressed again in January of 1918, when “the treasurer brought up names of unions and members in arrears, some several

years, some never had paid dues. Moved and seconded that an effort be made to see them personally and an appeal be made to them to pay up” (Reel 2 0590).

On a more positive note within the League, they did still have some social activities targeting working-class members, such as when we are told in December of 1914 that there was a “suggestion from Mrs Cram that a Dance be given once a week during January in the League rooms in co-operation with the Retail Clerks’ Union and that organized and unorganized women be invited. Mrs Cram will furnish music and pay for the use of the room” (Reel 2 0327), in September of 1915 that “a group of Bag Makers went out to Mrs Cram’s House Monday July 5th and spent a pleasant time” (Reel 2 0416), or when in December of 1915 we find that the League is offering swimming lessons through their Good Health League (Reel 2 0455), though the Good Health League did not last much longer, being discontinued in April of 1917 (Reel 2 0570). They continued the tradition of holding an annual Halloween party (Reel 2 0306, 0654). We also find another officer during this time who, while not stepping down as Helen Marot had done, did state in April of 1914 “that when the time came for a trade unionist to take the work of the Treasurer she wished the President and Executive Board to understand that she was willing to withdraw” (Reel 2 0243-0244). In this, we see that the League remained committed to the idea of trade union women being the guiding force in their activities, in an attempt to cultivate a type of sisterhood that led to the empowerment of working women to speak for themselves rather than an assumption that any woman, regardless of experience, would be able to speak for them.

The League also worked with and for working women outside of the League, such as with working women’s clubs, noting in May of 1914 that “A communication was received from the National League of Women Workers saying they would be glad to co-operate with us in

bringing a message of Trade Unionism to the different clubs in the State. Motion was made and seconded that we accept the invitation and write the President asking her to state the time and place where it will be possible to speak to the girls on trade unionism” (Reel 2 0259). On a more personal level, when a member of a metal polishers’ union asked the League in June of 1914 to help “in getting the wife of one of their members who has been on strike since last January into a Hospital,” the League was happy to report that they had been “able to get her in the hands of a good Doctor where she will receive good care and possibly arrest the disease for a few years” so that she “could care [for] and [be] with her two children for some time to come” (Reel 2 0267). In January of 1916, we find that the League intervened to help some working women when “the girls in the shop had told the Union that they must have a woman representative as they could not tell their grievance to the men, so the Union called on the League and we made a visit and heard the complain[t] and suggested that certain changes be made in the toilet rooms making it more private for the union girls, which I believe has been done” (Reel 2 0476). Finally, in March of 1916, when the Cannerymen of New York State asked for an exemption to the present hours laws, requesting “that the women be allowed to work until 12 o’clock or after at night with the privilege of beginning work at 10 o’clock in the morning” the League’s representative stated that, “needless to say that on behalf of the Women’s Trade Union League and of the working women of the State I opposed the extension of the present law” (Reel 2 0510). Perhaps it was “needless to say,” but she said it, and in doing so she reinforced the idea that the League stood by its working sisters and was ready to fight for their protection, which they did again in December of 1916 when “Miss Newman reported she had attended hearing at Albany on the health

insurance bill. This bill did not contain a maternity clause therefore she opposed it” (Reel 2 0554).

Of course, sisterhood could cut both ways, so I need to look at the League’s interactions with middle- and upper-class women during this time as well. The majority of these interactions took place in regard to suffrage, which I will examine shortly, but the League did also engage with them in other areas. For example, in May of 1916, we find that “On the request of Miss Alice Henry it was decided to send a speaker to the Industrial delegation of the Federation of Women’s Clubs” (Reel 2 0527) and in March of 1918, we read that “The Women’s City Club asked for a delegate to attend a joint meeting of Women’s Organizations to consider some of the City’s problems. The secretary was ordered to attend this meeting” (Reel 2 0597). As always, there remained a financial aspect to the League’s interactions with these women, with the illustrative example in December of 1917 of a \$1,000.00 donation to the League, incidentally from one of Mary Dreier’s sisters, Dorothea Dreier (Reel 2 0587). Beyond the financial, however, we see them trying to engage their allies more fully in their work, though in mentioning a plan to do so, they also reveal their past prejudice against them, stating in December of 1917 that “the League in the past few years has worked on a policy of eliminating allies as workers. It was the sense of the Board members that we try now to get the interest of our allies, that we make an effort to give them something to do” (Reel 2 0585). While the implication of just giving them something to do is a bit condescending, it does indicate a renewed effort to overcome their differences and make a reality the sisterhood across class lines that they so often invoke.

I also need to look at how League members interacted with one another in the name of sisterhood. When it came to illness and major life events, they seemed to do pretty well. In January of 1914, we find that Leonora O'Reilly "is sick and unable to be at work for at least six months" and the League responded by granting her a six month leave of absence sending her "an affectionate and bossy letter" (Reel 2 0204-0205), and when her heart condition leads her illness to linger on, we find that the League was still making sisterly gestures by sending her fruit baskets the following year (Reel 2 0383). Similarly, when in February of 1914 they received a "letter from the President Miss Mary Dreier stating that it would be impossible for her to take the nomination as President of the League for another year on account of ill health," they responded by sending her a letter "stating that the Board regrets that ill health necessitates her resignation and the appreciation of the Board of the many years of loyal, faithful service and the hope that she may be with us in the future" (Reel 2 0222). Along the same lines, in October of 1914, the League celebrated the arrival of a new baby girl born to League members, Mr. and Mrs. Kropp, by collecting \$10.00 to purchase a gift (Reel 2 0292). In times of sorrow, the League also responded, as in September of 1915 when they sent a letter of sympathy to "Brother Boyle" on the death of his mother (Reel 2 0415).

They were less consistent in their treatment of those members who wished to resign from their positions within the League for reasons other than illness (or the desire to pass the torch to a trade unionist). Ironically, the member who received the most abuse for her resignation during this time would also be made President, remaining in that office for the duration of the New York League, Rose Schneiderman. In December of 1914, we find that Schneiderman has sent a letter

resigning as paid worker and Vice-President of the League. While the Board accepts her resignation, they also plan to send her a letter:

stating that the Board regretted very much that she should take this step at this time, as at the October meeting when the request came asking that Miss Schneiderman be released the Board had made it clear that she could not be spared at this time. With the National Convention to be held in New York the Board felt there would be no lack of work. If as Vice-President she felt it important to speak on subjects the League does not stand for and on this account the position is an embarrassing one the Board felt there was no other way open than to accept the resignation. (Reel 2 0325-0326)

The best way to understand how this represents their harshest response is to compare it with several other resignations. When Leonora O'Reilly sent a letter of resignation in September of 1915, the League voted that "the letter be laid on the table until after November 2nd and that the Secretary be instructed to write Miss O'Reilly asking her to meet the Board at a time when convenient to her in order that all the members understand clearly her position in tendering her resignation" (Reel 2 0413-0414). This is hardly the immediate-yet-bitter acceptance that Schneiderman got. O'Reilly agreed to the meeting (Reel 2 0428) and was asked to speak on behalf of the League at the Church of the Messiah in the meantime (Reel 2 0428). When the special meeting came, O'Reilly "stated that she felt her usefulness with the League group was over and that the work of organization of the workers must be done by the workers themselves," and she went on to list off several grievances against male labor groups. In the discussion that followed, it was noted that "it was brought out that the work of the League, organization of women workers, was not yet completed and the necessity of the League taking action on some

legislative questions. It was made very clear that the League was not in business to reform the men's labor movement, but to organize women." Despite this telling statement, which indicated that in this instance the League was inclined to favor class solidarity over the demands of sisterhood, they still requested that she reconsider her resignation (Reel 2 0442-0443).

In the case of Secretary Alice Bean, we find an interesting turn of events. In January of 1916, we find that the League had appointed a committee to investigate Bean because they:

had understood that Miss Bean wished to be released from the routine office work to do organization work, but after the meeting of the Committee it was understood that such was not the case and there was nothing to report. Miss Bean said that she wanted it made clear that in working in the interest of her Union she was doing so after the matter had been brought up before the Board and if there was any misunderstanding or change of opinion as to what time should be used for the Stenographer's Union, she wished it to be clear now, as neither she nor the Union would want and service which was not given willingly. (Reel 2 0480)

Despite these findings, however, the following month "Miss Bean asked the Board to accept her resignation as Secretary of the League and stated that she was giving a month's notice." The Board asked her to reconsider (Reel 2 0502), but she sent a letter in March "reaffirming her resignation" and they decided "to accept Miss Bean's resignation with regret and to insist that she accept the salary for the last month as her illness was due to the strain of the League work" (Reel 2 0507). When the general membership were informed of her resignation at the April meeting, "Miss Dreier spoke of Miss Bean's long service with the League and of the good work she had done" and it was "moved by Miss Dreier and seconded that we send a letter of

regret and sincere appreciation of her work for the League to Miss Bean” (Reel 2 0517). While Bean’s apparent illness may have contributed to the more sisterly reception of her resignation that the League gave, (though I personally find it very suspicious) such was not the case in the final example I need to examine.

In March of 1916, Melinda Scott “told the Board that on account of her difficult position in the jurisdiction fight between the Cap Makers and the Straw and Panama Hat union she wished to resign from the presidency of the League. Miss Newman moved and Miss Marot seconded the motion that the League refuse to consider Miss Scott’s resignation” (Reel 2 0509). Here, while I might question the sincerity of her resignation given how quickly she gave up the idea, the League’s opposition to her leaving was certainly stronger than with the others. When she did leave the League in September of 1917, the following exchange took place: “Miss Newman moved that Miss Scott receive one month’s salary in lieu of her vacation. Miss Scott refused to accept the money as she had left the League and had taken another position. The treasurer was instructed to make out the check” (Reel 2 0576). Rather than acting as if they had been betrayed, as they had when Mrs. Ostrow had left and when Schneiderman resigned, they seem determined to be as kind to her as possible, providing her with more salary than she was owed, rather than fighting to keep from paying her. It is noteworthy, however, that the one who stuck with the League the longest was the one who was given the worst treatment in this regard, so even if graciousness did break down at times, the sense of sisterhood could be regained.

As mentioned in the last time period, one of the ways that the League tried to foster sisterhood was by encouraging more members to get involved in active organization work, most recently through the Organization Committee. That committee continued to meet, though an

assignment reported in February of 1914 had unintended and long term ramifications. The innocuous-seeming task was for all the committee members to prepare a three minute speech following an outline that they had been given (Reel 2 0219). The consequences weren't felt immediately, as the League blithely discussed plans for readings and lectures for the committee on various topics related to trade unionism (Reel 2 0219-0220). Again, on March 2, 1914, the report was still upbeat, with further plans for discussions followed by "deep breathing exercises and three minute speeches" and all members invited to join the committee (Reel 2 0225). By April, however, the report is that "I am very sorry to say that the meetings have not been attended very well since, whether the speeches scared the girls, or whether it was because the meetings of the Conference in regard to the mass meeting have been held the evening previous. The Organization Committee will continue to meet after the mass meeting at Cooper Union. Miss Marot was to give the lecture on 'The History of Trade Unions in America, but on account of the small attendance at the last two meetings Miss Marot was asked to postpone the lecture until there was a better attendance" (Reel 2 0252). With even the education plans stymied, it was unlikely that the committee would produce much in the way of active participation. There was one promising example of sisterhood in March of 1916, however, arising out of two members finding a way to work out an issue harmoniously. When Melinda Scott asked the Board to decide between a tied election for the delegate to the CFU, one of the candidates stepped down, saying "that she would withdraw as she felt that the delegateship would be of value to Mrs. Donner in the organization of the waitresses" (Reel 2 0508).

Before moving on to our last look at suffrage, I'd like to discuss a few times when the League's stance of sisterhood among women was seriously called into question. The first one

we'll look at was not the first to occur chronologically, but it is slightly different in nature so I want to deal with it separately. In December of 1915, Melinda Scott reported on a trip to Meridan, Connecticut that she and Mary Dreier had made at the request of Brother Flynn from the Metal Polishers' Union. They spoke to a meeting in the town hall, "composed of strikers and wives and mothers of strikers. There was no men to be present. The town hall was crowded with women. These women struck with the men for an Eight Hour Day and a twenty five per cent increase. They have been out eight or nine weeks. We found them all very enthusiastic . . . they ha[d] no organization before the strike. The women have organized wonderfully and have been able to get financial assistance from the people of the community" (Reel 2 0460). All of this speaks to the power of women and sisterhood, but the League representatives were asked "to try and arouse some of the women of Meriden to protest against strike breakers being brought into the town. We spent Saturday and all Sunday morning visiting the women connected with the clubs, suffrage organizations, Y.W.C.A. and the social life of the town, but was unable to find one woman who would interest herself on the side of the strikers" (Reel 2 0460). They took it upon themselves, as a result, to call the president of the company themselves and set up an interview. Despite receiving them kindly, he refused to accede to any of their requests to not bring in strike breakers. Their frustration, however, was not directed at him, but at the women of the town: "We left Meriden not thinking very highly of the women of that town, outside of the strikers, but firm in the opinion that the working women of Meriden had at least been awakened to the necessity of organization and would work out their own salvation" (Reel 2 0461). Had these League members not believed in the existence of sisterhood across class lines, it seems unlikely that they would have been surprised and disappointed by the town's women's failure to

come to the aid of the strikers. The company president who “said that he was a God fearing man and he had no regrets, he talked about his people as if he was a paternal grandfather” (Reel 2 0461) seemed to be exactly what they expected him to be, but they expected more and better out of the women, and so spoke worse of them than of the employer.

The second example occurred in January of 1914, when the League was held “responsible for the enactment of the night law” by the Bookbinders Union, and was asked “to speak on the platform with other people to explain what was to be done with the women who had been thrown out of work.” The League’s answer was that they were not “responsible for the passing of the Bill, but when there had been danger of it being repealed one of our workers had gone and spoken in favor of the Bill” and that “the one remedy was organization; and that in the case of all good things the night law worked hardship on a few and as is often the case, the few suffer for the good of the many” (Reel 2 0188). The workers were not particularly convinced by these platitudes as they still demanded to know who should have informed them of the hearings on the law so that they could have protested it, which they seemed to think should have been done by the League. In an attempt to appease them, there were promises made that they would “see if something could not be done for the girls who only worked eight hours and were in danger of losing their jobs through this law” (Reel 2 0188-0189). In this case, the League had acted in what they believed to be the best interest of working women, but at least some of those women resented their interference and harbored no sisterly feelings towards them.

In the next example, the difference of opinion was essentially the same, but this time it was the League members who were throwing a fit over the actions of working women who disagreed with them. In April of 1918, a member asked that a committee be formed and sent to

the Typographical Union to “find out who is financing the League for Equal Opportunity, composed of their members, and who is paying the expenses of their members appearing against the different Labor Bills in Albany. Miss Dreier stated further that these women were opposing every bit of protective legislation for women and children” (Reel 2 0600). They opted instead to send a letter to the State Federation of Labor, the Central Federated Union and the Central Labor Union, asking just what this League for Equal Opportunity is, and if the members of Big Six were sent to speak on a certain bill for that Union only, as three of their members were apparently violating every principle of that Union and blocking legislation for protection of women and children, and if Typographical Union favored their members doing that” (Reel 2 0600-0601). After the letter was sent, the League made sure to follow up on the results, with a representative reporting that she:

attended the meeting of the union last Sunday, at which our letter was read, and two letters were read in answer, from these women, denying in toto everything we said, and making slanderous attacks upon the League. I took the floor and explained the situation. Two of these women also took the floor, and after considerable discussion, it was moved to appoint a committee to investigate the whole matter. Mr. Holland brought the affair up before the Central Federated Union last Friday night, and I understand that there will be a meeting of the Central Bodies to make recommendation to Typographical Union on this matter. I have written to Mr. Holland, Mr Fitzgerald, Mr. Kovelesky and Mrs Leavitt the Legislative agent of the State Women Suffrage Party, asking them for a statement of what they say these women do at Albany, so that I will be well supplied with evidence when the time comes for it” (Reel 2 0607).

In June, we are updated that “at the last monthly meeting of Typographical Union, the report of the committee to investigate the women who went to Albany was brought in. The women were criticized for their behavior, though they were really let off easily. I spoke on what had taken place at our Legislative Conference, and explained that the trade union women were not in favor of exemptions” (Reel 2 0630). In this instance, we find the League completely unable to fathom that there could be a version of feminism that would attack the protective legislation they had worked so hard to put in place on the grounds that it resulted in unequal treatment, and also that there could be more than one opinion on the subject among “trade union women.” It is a bizarre statement to make given that they know that the League for Equal Opportunity is composed of trade unionists. In one other incident surrounding this idea, it was unclear whether they were making some effort to understand this position or simply hoping to have it denied when, in April of 1919, they note writing a long letter to Mme Duchene, Secretary of the White Goods Workers of France, “asking her . . . the truth about this matter,” the matter being her public statement that “she no longer believed in special legislation for women” (Reel 2 0704).

Suffrage Campaign

We’d love to, but can’t

Despite this widening gap between the League’s version of feminism and that espoused by other factions of the woman movement during this time, it was also during this period that their involvement in suffrage work reached a fever pitch. As with the last section on suffrage, however, I will look first at the times when they said to suffrage work, we’d love to but can’t, then at their actual work, and finally at the shortcomings they pointed out within the suffrage movement. This time around, I have just four examples of them declining to engage in suffrage

work. The first one occurred on January 22, 1914, and is not so much a refusal of participation as a discussion of the financial conditions that would have to be met in order for them to participate. They were asked by the Women's Suffrage Party to send a delegate to Washington to meet women from all over the country as well as the President and their response was that "it would be impossible to raise the money for the expenses but it might be possible to send delegates and pay them for their time off. If the League paid for the time off and provided the people the Suffrage party should pay the expenses" (Reel 2 0208). This illustrates well the reluctance that the League felt regarding financial contributions to suffrage work, though the fact that they would consider putting up money at all is a sign that they are softening towards the idea. Then again, the next example is a refusal based on finances, as well as concern over too close an association with any one suffrage organization. On September 24, 1914, it is reported that Mrs. Blatch "of the Woman's Political union" asked the League to "appoint a representative to serve on a suffrage Committee to work in connection with Miss Casey and also . . . that the League contribute towards Miss Casey's salary. Moved by Mrs Wise seconded by Miss Svenson that a letter be sent to Mrs Blatch telling her that the League has not money to contribute to suffrage and that as an organization it cannot ally itself with one particular suffrage group" (Reel 2 0281).

In two other cases, the League simply "received" requests from suffrage groups without responding. First, on January 29, 1915 we see the following: "Letter from Woman's Political Union with invitation for Ball and request that a speaker be allowed to address the meeting of the League on suffrage received and filed" (Reel 2 0334). Now, one might think since this is the same group they refused before that they simply have a problem with this group, but the next passive-aggressive refusal was to a different suffrage organization, one they had participated

with in the past, but on February 7, 1916, they responded as follows: “Request from Woman Suffrage Party for 10 delegates to their meeting on Feb. 24th at which the matter of Federal Action is to be taken up. Communication received” (Reel 2 0491).

Work for it

Of course, the League said yes to suffrage work far more often in these years. These efforts fell into four basic categories: speaking engagements, a statewide campaign to win over union men to the cause, participation in suffrage-sponsored events, and the creation or support of petitions, resolutions, or statements in favor of suffrage. To begin, let’s look at the sorts of speaking engagements they took on, and how they discussed them in the record. In January of 1914, they granted credentials to a Miss Hinchey so that she could appear before unions and explain the need for the ballot (Reel 2 0187) and she assured them in June that “in speaking for Suffrage she makes it [her] business always to bring in the need of organization for women” (Reel 2 0188). This is a key statement, as it characterizes essentially all of the speaking that League members did on suffrage. In February of 1915, we find a mention of speaking on suffrage imbedded in a sentence otherwise about speaking on organization: “I spoke on organization at the request of the American Branch of the Waist Makers and also the Neckwear Makers Union and the Need of Suffrage for Working Women in Brooklyn at the request of the Woman Suffrage Party” (Reel 2 0352), and even in mentioning suffrage, it’s in relation to women workers’ need for it. In October of 1915, we find a League representative speaking to a Hat Trimmers meeting on suffrage, “where they passed a resolution protesting against the New Jersey State Federation of Labor not endorsing suffrage,” and then we hear how she obtained credentials from the Essex Trade Council to visit labor unions, but only made use of them once.

The reason, she states, “was that because I found we wasted so much time waiting outside the meeting rooms and I felt that we could do better work on the Street.” She further notes that “I spoke on Suffrage one noon before Clarke’s Thread Mill and with that suffrage speech they got quite some trade unionism” (Reel 2 0431-0432). We see here that even when focusing on labor organizations proved difficult, the value of trade unionism combined with the ballot remained central. Again, in October of 1915 we find the claim that “I spoke before the Textile Workers Convention on trade unionism and suffrage” (Reel 2 0434), and in April of 1918, that “I spoke to the Upholsterers women of Philadelphia, on the working women’s need of the ballot, and had a conference the same afternoon with the Suffrage leaders and officers of the League, on the possibility of organizing the Industrial Section. That the conference bore fruit is certain, because of their request for a working woman who could do that work” (Reel 2 0611). In this case, even their work with mainstream suffrage workers is justified in terms of what they accomplished for working women, and how they won the suffrage women over to their cause, rather than vice versa.

The second type of suffrage work that I will look at is the state wide campaign that the League launched in 1915 in order to win labor men to the suffrage cause because, after all, it was only men who could actually vote to pass laws or amendments granting women suffrage. Mary Dreier first suggested the formation of a committee “to work for suffrage in connection with the labor men of the State” (Reel 2 0368) in April of 1915, and in May, they gave the following plan: “That the Women’s Trade Union League have a Committee . . . to get in touch first with the State Federation of Labor to ask for a special Suffrage Committee from them to work with the League Committee. They together to ask for additional members from all City Central Bodies; to

organize local meetings; to establish a State Wide Suffrage Enrollment Committee of Trade Unionists so that the names and addresses of voters favoring suffrage may be listed” (Reel 2 0374-0375). In June, they received a letter from the State Federation of Labor promising to cooperate and furnish credentials for League representatives to go through the state speaking on suffrage, so the League decided to send two people through the state speaking for suffrage and asking labor men to sign petitions and central bodies to endorse their plans. Immediately following this is yet another message from Mrs Blatch, “asking the League to cooperate with them in arranging labor mass meetings in certain large towns in the State,” to which they replied that “the League has already planned to carry on such work through the State on a very extensive scale” (Reel 2 0388-0389). In this way, we see further evidence that they wish to work for suffrage on their own terms, surprisingly emphasizing class solidarity most when they are working for a cause seeming to unite all women.

In July of 1915, we find further evidence that the League is making over the cause of suffrage to fit their values and agenda when Leonora O’Reilly “reported that the Woman Suffrage Party is willing to cooperate with the League in the work among the labor men of New York State” (Reel 2 0394-0395). It is also at this meeting that we are told the committee is working under the incredibly catchy name, “Women’s Trade Union League State Committee to Secure Votes for Women Nov. 2nd. 1915” and that the “Women’s Political Union is willing to pay all expenses and cooperate with the League Committee in New Jersey” (Reel 2 0394-0395). Again, the emphasis is on how the suffrage women are cooperating with (and paying for) the League’s agenda rather than the other way around. This is demonstrated again when they mention that in speaking in New Jersey on behalf of suffrage, they believe they might not “get

suffrage only home to the workers, but trade union organization, because we intend to speak from the street corners and meet the men and women there whom we could not meet under any other circumstances” (Reel 2 0403). In September, the news of the committee continued to roll in, with reports of letters sent to “all the Presidents and Secretaries of unions through New York State and also to the labor journals,” plans for a Cooper Union mass meeting, and the claim that “The Woman Suffrage Party is cooperating with the Committee in every possible way.” As for their work in New Jersey, Melinda Scott reported speaking there, and also that “the State Federation of Labor of New Jersey had opposed suffrage at their recent Convention and on this account the United Hat Trimmers had passed a resolution at a recent meeting against affiliating with such a reactionary body,” which action only appeared in the papers through the efforts of the League to get credentials from a different central body there in order to visit unions on behalf of suffrage (Reel 2 0405).

On September 30, we note an interesting change in terms of the League’s financial contributions to suffrage. While they still note of their upcoming Cooper Union mass meeting that “the Woman Suffrage Party is paying for the hall and the printing,” they also report that “the Committee had authorized Miss Scott to engage Mrs Maud Swartz to work in connection with Miss Scott in New Jersey until October 19th and then to continue her work in the New York Campaign until November 2nd at \$25.00 per week and expenses.” Additionally, Mary Dreier states that “a part of the money given to the League during the past month could be used for suffrage work,” with \$200.00 subsequently advanced to the Suffrage Committee from the League treasury” (Reel 2 0411). Granted, they also turned their attention to getting financing for their suffrage work from some of the larger suffrage organizations in 1916 (Reel 2 0471), but

even in doing that, they were recognizing that suffrage had a right to more of their attention. In addition to finances, they also begin giving more generously of their space to the suffrage cause, with “the Assembly Room [to] be given over to the Committee during the day for the next month” (Reel 2 0414). This is in marked contrast to the begrudging allowance of a meeting room to Leonora O’Reilly’s suffrage efforts in the last time period, showing a marked increase in the League’s commitment to suffrage. This enthusiasm could be abated, however, if a request for action came from the Socialist Suffrage Campaign Committee rather than one of the other groups, as on October 4, 1915, when a long list of Suffrage Committee activities and plans is followed by a request from that group that “the League take a box for the meeting to be held at Carnegie Hall Wed. Oct. 17th at 2.P.M.” to which the League responded that “the matter be referred to unfinished business and the Socialist Suffrage Campaign Committee be notified of the action taken” (Reel 2 0421-0422), which seems to be the passive aggressive way of refusing without refusing.

Nevertheless, most of the coverage of their work was positive, with the exception of one comment in October of 1915 regarding the Central Federated Union and the feeling that “a good deal of work would have to be done among the men in that Body in order to convince them of the need of giving women the vote” (Reel 2 0422). It is the CFU, however, so I would expect nothing less out of them. They continued their efforts, however, noting in January of 1916 that “we must do more work with the women in the future and we do feel that no one is in a better position to do it with the working women than the Women’s Trade Union League” (Reel 2 0475), or, in other words, that their sisterhood with working women demanded that they keep up the

fight. As they continued this work, they found that other labor men were, slightly, more accommodating, as we see in the following report for September of 1916:

We have had three organizers doing house to house canvassing. Addressed leaflet to working men throughout state. Had two fine meetings in settlements. Over 200 attended one meeting. Miss Olcott reports real demand throughout state from working women for ballot. Miss Svenson's reported on suffrage resolution submitted to convention of State F. of L. at Glens Falls. Electrical workers at Glens Falls accepted suffrage resolution and sent our resolution to convention. Was not accepted as they wished to take no further action considering they had already endorsed suffrage. Mr. Brady incorporated it in his legislative report and in this way it was accepted. Cigar Makers also endorsed it. (Reel 2 0534)

In December, they remained hopeful, noting that "there is great opportunity if we can get hold of the trade unionists through the state. Miss Schneiderman has been engaged to do up state work. The co-operation of all is urgently demanded" (Reel 2 0551-0552), and again in September of 1917, Mary Dreier "hoped that members would rally to the call to help suffrage as much work remains to be done. Mrs Donner offered to help afternoons" (Reel 2 0579).

Part of that hopefulness played out in the third type of participation I will examine, participation in suffrage events. In October of 1914, they once again accepted box seats to a meeting at Carnegie Hall where Cristabel Pankhurst would speak (Reel 2 0297), and Rose Schneiderman announced that she would be attending a suffrage convention in Nashville, TN (Reel 2 0297). One of their most common activities, however, was to participate in the various suffrage parades. In October of 1915, we see the "recommendation from the Executive Board

that the League march in the suffrage parade with the banner and invite the unions to march with them” (Reel 2 0423). Incidentally, at that same October meeting, the League also agreed easily and without hesitation to a request of the Socialist Suffrage Campaign Committee to take a \$5.00 box for one of their meetings. Far more space in the record was given to their plans for the parade, though again, the focus is on how they are relating that effort to the labor movement, distributing slips on the parade at shop meetings, as well as advertising their Cooper Union meeting on suffrage (Reel 2 0427). Perhaps the most poignant participation of theirs in a parade was described by a representative as follows in October of 1915: “After returning from Albany I went to the suffrage headquarters in Newark and was there when the women of Jersey received their death blow as far as suffrage was concerned. The day after election a street meeting was held and the suffrage campaign was again started. That afternoon there were two thousand letters sent out asking the members to attend the suffrage parade to be held in New York October 23rd” (Reel 2 0434). Again, in October of 1917, we have an invitation for everyone to “parade for suffrage” (Reel 2 0582).

The final type of work I will examine involved endorsements and petitions. In August of 1914, the Woman Suffrage Party asked them to endorse a pamphlet on “Why Working Women Should Vote,” which the League did (Reel 2 0274). Later that month, they accepted the following resolution to present at the State Federation of Labor Convention:

WHEREAS: The women of New York State are at present waging a campaign for political freedom and,

WHEREAS: The eight hundred thousand working women of the state are chiefly concerned in the successful outcome of this campaign, as all through history the disfranchised worker has always been the lowest paid and,

WHEREAS: The enfranchisement of the working women will strengthen the hands of the working men in their struggle for industrial justice, be it,

RESOLVED: That the New York State Federation of Labor in Convention assembled go on record, as did the parent body, the American Federation of Labor, in endorsing 'Votes for Women' and pledge the active co-operation of the unions and union men of the State in securing the constitutional amendment. (Reel 2 0277)

They were also asked in November of 1914 by the Woman's Committee of the Socialist Party to "endorse a petition calling upon the Constitutional Convention to abolish the political inequality of women by amending the Constitution so as to grant women equal suffrage with men," which they agreed to do (Reel 2 0315). They also agreed to let Melinda Scott's name as President of the League to be given as an honorary committee member for the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Centennial (Reel 2 0367) in April of 1915. In May, they decided to have League delegates request the endorsement of the State Federation of Labor for the League's Special Suffrage Committee's plan of action for suffrage (Reel 2 0379), and that October, they sent "a telegram of protest to the New Jersey State Federation of Labor on account of their not having endorsed suffrage for women at their recent convention," though they also discussed plans to try to reach the New Jersey delegates through the AFL Convention (Reel 2 0423). In a rather hilarious comment given the League's own inconsistent history in terms of work for suffrage, they also noted that October one member's opinion, stating "In passing may I say that the Central Labor Body of Trenton,

New Jersey have always been great advocates of woman suffrage. Brother Spare one of their members was the one who introduced the suffrage resolution in the New Jersey State Convention and fought very hard for its adoption” (Reel 2 0435).

While I already touched on the financial aspects of the League’s suffrage work a bit, I want to look now at how this process continued to evolve. We saw them devote some of their funds to suffrage, then ask suffrage organizations to fund their suffrage work, but eventually they began asking the suffrage groups to help fund the League’s regular work. In January of 1916, they decided to appoint a committee “to raise money for carrying on the work of the League. The Suffragists to be appealed to especially” (Reel 2 0479). It’s significant that they start fundraising among the suffragists because they are confident that their interests are now sufficiently aligned for them to be giving mutual support, rather than one-sided support. While this may not have been the case, the League clearly felt that their work on suffrage had created a coalition of sisterhood between them and the suffrage organizations that justified their repeated requests for financial assistance. Once more, in October of 1917, “there was a discussion on the condition of the League’s finances . . . Miss Dreier suggested that after the suffrage victory some of the suffragists be approached” (Reel 2 0580). Of course, this call to mutual endorsement went beyond the financial, with the League supporting the suffrage movements endeavors but expecting similar support in return. One form of this can be seen in June of 1918, when we find “The New York State Suffrage Party called a special meeting to plan for a campaign against Senator Brown. We had an interview with Mrs. Laidlaw before the meeting at which we suggested that they finance a couple of labor women as speakers in the campaign. They agreed to do this” (Reel 2 0630). Similarly, in November of 1918, we hear from a League representative

that “I attended a Board meeting of the Woman Suffrage Party, to make plans for the Convention. I suggested that they bring in some resolutions on their attitude on Re-construction” (Reel 2 0665). The most telling example, however, came in December of 1918, with the following description of how the League gained another endorsement:

I went to Albany to a Convention of the Woman Suffrage Party, to submit our Legislative Program and the program of the State Federation of Labor for their endorsement. They endorsed our program without any difficulty, but balked at the State Federation’s program. This was referred to the Executive Committee. At this meeting we brought the bills and explained the matter to them as clearly as we could, and the program was endorsed. Mr. Lynch had asked us to secure this endorsement. At the Convention, the party decided to form non-partisan leagues when necessary, to defeat undesirable candidates. A Woman Voters’ Council, national in scope, is to be formed after the success of the Federal Amendment. (Reel 2 0673)

Here we see the League acting as the kind sister, guiding the wayward suffragists into accepting a legislative program that serves the interests of labor as well as of women, as the League sees them, at any rate. This once again reinforces the idea that their relationship with the suffragists is a two-way street and that they are receiving benefit from it as well as bestowing it in the form of more support and votes for suffrage through their labor connections. Further evidence for this is that they were able to get the Women’s Non-Partisan League, Women’s City Club in Mount Vernon, and the Council of Women’s War Organizations to also endorse their legislative program (Reel 2 0673). Their final act for suffrage was to have a representative present in Albany in June of 1919 to see the Suffrage Amendment ratified (Reel 2 0715).

What you're doing wrong

It is not, however, the last item I will examine in relation to suffrage, as I still need to consider the objections that League members had to certain actions of the suffragists that they felt the need to point out and try to correct. Most of their frustration with them during this time surrounded the fact that the clerical staff of most suffrage organizations did not belong to the Bookkeepers, Stenographers, and Accountants' Union. In April of 1914, Mr. Boyle, who is a member of the union reported "that there were many of the Suffrage offices still unorganized, but they were slowly organizing" (Reel 2 0244-0245), however, in May, he stated "that all suffrage organizations were disinclined to employ union office workers" (Reel 2 0257). In response to this newfound angst against them, the League decided to form a committee to "call upon the suffrage organizations and tell them that the League understands they do not employ union office workers and that it considers the time has arrived that the suffrage organizations must insist that their employees belong to the Union" (Reel 2 0257). In June, Mr. Boyle is again claiming that the suffrage organizations "were falling in line and the B.S.&A.U, is thankful to the League for the work it did in bringing that about" (Reel 2 0264), and the report of just what they had done was revealing, telling them "they would have to have a closed shop if they wanted to stand in with labor," and when the suffragists said "they did not believe in forcing anyone to join if they did not want to," the League representative retorted that she "did and we would expect to hear favorably from them" (Reel 2 0268). Negotiations continued with them into August and September, but with the sense that there would not be much objection to organization in the office and the League's promise, in turn, to push for a strong suffrage endorsement at the State Federation of Labor Convention (Reel 2 0276, 0283).

The next fault that the League took issue with was related to this first one. In March of 1916, the League received “a letter from Mrs. Blatch . . . complaining to the League of her unfair treatment at the hands of the stenographers’ union and her disinclination to remain in the League on account of the attack.” Just what the nature of that “attack” was is not recorded, but the “Secretary was instructed to write to Mrs. Blatch saying that the grievance was with the Union and had nothing to do with the League, that she might recognize that representatives of the League had without pay worked for her organization through the suffrage campaign” (Reel 2 0508). The thing is, the League had forced the suffrage organizations into organizing their clerical staff into that union, so her complaint is potentially valid. In the League’s eyes, however, the service that they had rendered to the suffrage movement by working for them entitled them to not be blamed or harassed over some aspect of their connection with labor that the suffragists now found objectionable. This is another of those times where the break down of sisterly compassion and understanding actually serves to highlight the League’s belief in the same. If they didn’t feel that they deserved better, they probably would not have reacted in the near blackmail fashion that they did. Indeed, the final example of the League’s chastisement of the suffrage movement illustrates this belief as well, when they encourage the Woman Suffrage Party in February of 1918 “to broaden the scope of the work so that all women may be taken in” (Reel 2 0594). Their belief in sisterhood and the possibility that all women could work together for the benefit of all women remained in tact.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Now that we are all familiar with a healthy sampling of the League's records and how they changed, or remained constant, over time, we can consider just what sort of role these words played in the League's efforts to create a working fiction of coalition in order to overcome the many ethnic, class, and gender barriers to their unified action. Naturally, the rhetorical posturing that occurred in these documents was not the only force involved in manufacturing the League's sense of itself as part of a coalition, but I would argue that the continual affirmations of the kind of group the League was, with whom they preferred to associate, and the values for which they stood acted as a touchstone for members, even if an unconscious one, which laid the rhetorical groundwork for acts of unity during trying times that sought to tear the League apart. Even when resignations or the addition of new recruits seemed to threaten the League's sense of itself as a group, these written records reminded them in the familiar language of parliamentary procedure that they were worthy partners, that they were an important addition to the labor movement, and that they were uniquely situated to help their working sisters. It might be tempting to brush past this as common sense, that of course an organized group complete with officers keeping meeting minutes, making regular reports, and following standard operating procedures will be more enduring than a loose, unstructured collection of people, but considering the great importance that League members themselves placed on teaching women workers about parliamentary procedure and the pride they took in enabling those women to run their own union affairs, it is worth taking the time to try to unravel just how these routines, and the words they contained, helped to cement the League's organization.

Of course, when I talk about the League's coalition, it is important to understand that this is not a uniform entity, always employing the same rhetorical postures towards the same ends any more than any individual always behaves in the same manner in every situation. While several of the scholars who have dealt with the League in the past have focused on the idea that, as Robin Miller Jacoby puts it in describing both the British and American Women's Trade Union Leagues, "As mixed-class women's labor organizations, flanked in each country by a male-dominated labor movement and a middle-class-dominated feminist movement, the leagues contained in their very structure the contradictions inherent in the concepts of class and female solidarity" (xxiii), generally arguing that the league was ultimately unable to synthesize these two competing loyalties into a lasting and comprehensive answer to the problems working women faced as a result of both class and gender discrimination, I believe it is more helpful to approach them, instead, with an eye towards their flexibility with their rhetorical construction of identity over time. After all, we could accept at face value Nancy Schrom Dye's assessment that:

By the 1920s, in its continual attempts to reconcile class and gender, the league had moved toward emphasizing the latter. A conviction that women composed an oppressed group within the labor force had replaced the league's original conviction that women's problems in the workplace were inseparable from those of men and that those difficulties could be solved by integrating women into the labor movement. Despite the fact that the League in the 1920s was more of a working-class organization than it had been before the war, it had moved to a position of caste rather than of class consciousness (*As Sisters* 160)

In doing so, however, we lose sight of a certain amount of the complexity of the League's rhetorical appeals and positioning of themselves among the many groups with which they worked.

Of course it's true what these scholars have noted regarding the League: they were never able to overcome all of the difficulties that arose out of the diverse make-up of their membership and the populations they wished to serve. They couldn't synthesize feminism and class consciousness, they couldn't get completely beyond personal differences, they couldn't erase all traces of philanthropic condescension. But focusing on such failings misses the point, not only of what they did accomplish, but of most coalitions that have ever developed with a goal of performing some social good. The goal isn't to bring all participants into a cult-like sameness of feeling and adherence to the ideals of the cause; it is to create sufficient points of connection among them to motivate them to temporarily ignore their differences in order to accomplish some one task. If a group is able to create those points of connection again and again over time, among many people, their impact may be great, regardless of whether or not the rhetorical performances they employ to do so represent perfect internal consistency.

Frankly, I would argue that Dye is setting up too lofty of a goal for one group to achieve, which perhaps she does realize. In talking about why the League moved towards supporting suffrage rather than trying to remake the labor movement into a more equitable and inviting place for women workers, Dye states that:

The WTUL was simply not in a position early in the twentieth century to lay the groundwork for a feminist labor movement that synthesized women's needs as workers with their needs as women. The obstacles to such a course were too great: the absence of

a strong industrial union tradition, the lack of adequate financial resources, the hostility of the AFL, and the ethnic and occupational differences among women workers made this course impossible. Instead, the WTUL gradually abandoned the field of labor organizing and left the work of unionizing women to uninterested men. In that sense, the league's choice of suffrage as an answer to working women's situation was a retreat, not a feminist victory. (*As Sisters* 139)

Dye recognizes the difficulties they faced, but concludes with a note of sorrow over their defeat rather than an appreciation of what they did do given their material reality. By focusing on their flexible use of rhetorical posturing to create fluid identities, we can let them off the hook for not finding a permanent solution for addressing the problems women face in the workplace, and can instead celebrate, and perhaps emulate, what their temporary alliances did accomplish to improve the working lives of thousands of women, some of which can still be felt today.

To help us do just that, it will be useful to think about the League's various attempts to emphasize their coalitions with labor, working-class women, or middle-class suffragists or reformers not as a transformation from one identity as an organization to a completely different one, but rather as signs of the range of identities that the League had at their disposal. Ileen DeVault deals with this idea deftly in regard to individual workers in her examination of the roles of class and gender in the rise of craft unionism by employing Sartre's concept of the serial as follows:

Thinking about workers' identifications in this serial way does away with questions of whether any one category of identity is dominant over the others. Instead, the use of Sartre's concept underscores that every individual at every moment holds within herself

or himself a simultaneous range of possible identities. Which of these identities will enter the consciousness of this individual, and therefore inform his or her actions, at any particular point in time depends on each persons's role in the ongoing historical narrative, or serial. (7)

While I am inclined to grant more power to rhetorical choice than to one's fated role in history, I find the concept of "a simultaneous range of possible identities" incredibly helpful in understanding just what is going on in the League's rhetorical posturing over time. On the one hand, the eclectic make-up and allegiances of the League's membership contains many obstacles to their successful cohesion, but on the other, that same diversity means that they have a wider range of identities on which to draw in order to strike just the right pose to appeal to any one aspect of their members' values, or those of the groups with which they wish to engage, in order to accomplish some goal. Rather than thinking of them as a group that can't seem to decide whether they are a central body, or a women's group, or a reform society, this theory of a range of identities encourages us to think about how a shifting balance of those roles over time was a rhetorically effective strategy for the League.

Again, we can see a similar description of this balancing act in Annalise Orleck's exploration of the lives of four of the League's Jewish, working-class members, Rose Schneiderman, Clara Lemlich, Pauline Newman, and Leonora O'Reilly, when she notes:

But alone, working women had none of the political or economic clout needed to open up such doors of opportunity. To build a successful movement, the four knew they would have to win the support of more powerful allies. So they learned to build coalitions. From the time they left the shop floor until the end of their careers, they operated within a tense

nexus of union men, progressive middle- and upper-class women, and the working women they sought to organize. These alliances shifted continuously, requiring the four women to perform a draining and politically hazardous balancing act. (55)

Adding to the difficulty of this balancing act, of course, was the fact that the three groups she mentions were hardly uniform, themselves. As David Montgomery described of just one of them:

Although it was made up of millions of individuals, dozens of nationalities and religions, several races, and two sexes, the working class was a formidable fact of American life. Nevertheless, within that working class, the differential impact of the restructuring of capitalism on different groups of workers and workers' organizations had nurtured a variety of ideologies. More than that, despite the recognizable grounding of Gompers' craft unionism, middle-of-the-road building-trades practice, Socialism, Catholic action, syndicalism, and feminism in the same soil of working-class experience and the same celebration of mutualism over competitive individualism, these ideologies and the institutions in which they were embodied not only were different from one another but also were often bitterly antagonistic toward one another. (328)

In this light, the League's flexibility with their identity even in their repeated appeals to coalition-building through the rhetorical postures of cooperation, solidarity, and sisterhood that I have examined, can be seen as one of their greatest strengths, as maintaining that precarious position at the nexus of the three groups Orleck mentions enabled them to accomplish what they did for working women.

Our goal in this chapter, then, is to look at how the examples in the last three chapters contributed to the League's ability to conjure their various potential identities in constructive

ways, encouraging their members to identify, in Burke's sense of the term, with other groups and with one another in ways that would build up the League's coalitions and forward the task at hand. I will do this by following roughly along the path outlined by the previous three chapters, focusing on three main take-away illustrations of their rhetorical flexibility over time that we gain from a closer look at the material presented on cooperation, solidarity, and sisterhood. In some cases, material from more than one chapter will be considered together to enhance our discussion, but for the most part the previous divisions will stand. In choosing which illustrations to use, I opted to focus on those that both demonstrate some of the flexibility of the League's identity that is lost in a more straightforward, labor-to-feminism construction of their activities and would also benefit from more historical perspective or secondary scholarly comment.

Cooperation

In discussing the following examples from the chapter on cooperation, I will focus on teasing out the range of identities that the League employed in this rhetorical posture rather than just looking for a clear progression from cooperation with labor groups to cooperation with feminist groups. First I will look at how this flexibility was expressed through their depictions of themselves as worthy partners. Next, I'll look at their financial cooperation, particularly in regard to their ambivalent stance toward promoting the union label. Finally, I will take a closer look at how the League described their move toward using more legislative measures to reach or support their goals in addition to their direct organization efforts, with an eye toward demonstrating how their self-assessment differs somewhat from the interpretations of scholars like Dye and Jacoby.

Worthy Partners

I begin, then, with what we can learn from the League's many depictions of themselves as worthy partners, primarily in relation to labor men or working women on strike. According to Dye's assessment, the League's emphasis in this regard shifted over time from a picture of themselves as rather submissive helpmeets who responded to the requests of labor in whatever manner they asked, to one of them as empowered partners who had the knowledge and authority to decide for themselves how they ought, or ought not, to respond to requests that came their way, even as they continued to show that their help was worth seeking. While there is certainly evidence for this position within the examples I have explored, I need to consider the League's relationship to labor in general, and also acknowledge some of the diversity within the labor movement in order to appreciate the nuances of their changing rhetorical construction of what made them worthy partners.

I noted in my discussion of the historical context in which the League emerged that men in the labor movement didn't believe that it was worthwhile to spend time and money trying to organize women, with Nancy Schrom Dye, for instance, claiming that:

The AFL rejected women on three counts: they were unskilled, they were immigrants, and they were female. As unskilled workers, according to AFL reasoning, women threatened the job security and wage standards of traditional craftsmen. As immigrants, they disrupted the essential homogeneity of the skilled workforce in which laborers had developed common values and production standards. And as females, according to craftsmen's values, they belonged at home, not in factories or union halls. (*As Sisters*

13-14)

Of course, “rejected” might be too strong a word for the ambivalent stance of labor towards women by the time the League began its work. Certainly, the AFL and other central bodies had no desire to spend money on the organization of women, but should they organize on their own, established unions were supposedly willing to incorporate them (*As Sisters* 32), although, as Jacoby notes, actually getting them to do so was no small task as it often involved first

creat[ing] an organization to encompass their job categories and then fac[ing] the task of convincing an existing union to extend its definition of the craft to include unskilled and semiskilled workers. This process involved going to meetings, often at night, and pushing forcefully for recognition from male workers and employers. Since such behavior was contrary to notions internalized by both men and women about proper behavior for women, it was difficult for women to initiate and sustain such activity. (5)

But even if they did achieve recognition, this acceptance was often limited to a willingness to accept the women’s dues money and place union men in authority over them, with little or no attempt to give women members vote and voice regarding either the daily affairs of the union or the critical negotiations during strikes, as we have seen throughout the records.

After all, Dye does point out that while “every year the American Federation of Labor passed resolutions at its convention expressing solidarity with women workers . . . the resolutions were meaningless,” as the AFL didn’t hire any women organizers between the early 1890s and 1908, and at the convention where the WTUL was formed, only five of the 496 delegates present were women, only four of whom could actually vote (*As Sisters* 13). When the League came on the scene to try to make the AFL live up to their stated solidarity with women workers, therefore, they were fighting an uphill battle from the start. As Payne argues, “the

League threatened the Federation's conception of itself as a consortium binding together the steadiest of the union men from the most skilled crafts in pursuit of purely economic ends" (103). Nevertheless, the League worked tirelessly to convince the AFL that they were committed unionists who would defer to labor's requests and preferred procedures. Issues arose, however, because the League's focus on women led them into working with the trades where women were employed, which frequently led them not into the crafts dominated by the AFL's unions made up of predominantly native-born workers or those of northern European descent, but into those populated by Jewish and Italian immigrants, who had their own style of organization.

Again, as Dye noted, "Jewish and Italian men, however, were excluded from the elite trades and their unions and worked in immigrant industries and occupations. When they organized, as Jews did in the garment industry, they did so without the AFL craft unions' interest or help" (*As Sisters* 26). Yet these were the groups, like the United Hebrew Trades for instance, with whom the League found themselves working extensively. In trying to find their way to functioning labor partnerships, then, they had to deal with the overt discrimination from the AFL and its subsidiaries on the one hand, such as the difficulties they had getting full delegates appointed to the Central Federated Union and Central Labor Union of Brooklyn, or the fact that they never did achieve that status with the AFL (Jacoby 75), and on the other with organization methods and further gender discrimination from the more radical unions of the Jewish dominated East Side, knowing all the while that the two labor groups did not see eye-to-eye with one another. Talk about a precarious balancing act.

The League's rhetorical postures, as a result of occupying this nexus, were rather ambivalent toward labor right from the start of the period under examination. A closer look at the League's interactions with the White Goods Workers illustrates this well. When we first see a record of them interacting with this union in April of 1907, the League, while willing to try for the closed shop that the union wanted, expressed some doubts as to the likely success of the demand for such a newly formed group. Perhaps in response to their doubts about the decisions the union was making, they encouraged them to affiliate with the AFL so that they could make use of the union label (Reel 1 0183-0184). In their discussion of their actions, they are portraying themselves as willing helpers, it's true, but they are also hinting at their own knowledge of better methods for the union to follow. By May of 1911, this becomes more pronounced as they are plotting to have one of their members hired in at one of the factories employing White Goods Workers in order to organize the American women from within, so that they could "show at the time of the meeting of the International Ladies Garment Workers that it was possible to organize from the inside without calling a general strike" (Reel 1 0769). Rather than showing a turn away from organization, this move highlights their favoring of one methodology over another, which played out during the same time in their internal debates over whether they ought to focus on organizing Jewish women on the East Side or native-born women uptown, but it also shows them still trying to maintain their relationship with the ILGWU, hoping to use their actions to nudge them toward a different practice rather than cutting ties with them or openly criticizing them. That position became less tenable for them, however, when Helen Marot published her letter lambasting the East Side union in the Forwards that same month (Reel 1 0772-0774).

Given the falling out between the League and the Waist Makers and other East Side Unions following that letter, it is not so surprising that in January of 1913, when the League rather grudgingly participated in a general strike of the White Goods Workers that they had hoped to prevent, their description highlights the League's generous and skilled attempts to aid striking women despite the ineptitude and ingratitude of the men running the strike, followed by their decision to not ask their membership for financial contributions towards the strike (Reel 2 0011-0012). While this shows a shift in their attitude and assessment of labor men, it is more a matter of degree than kind. They never had fully agreed or wholeheartedly cooperated with the brand of organization embraced by this type of union, though by giving free vent to their dissatisfaction with them unaccompanied by affirmations of the AFL's methodology, we can see evidence of their growing struggle to remain at the nexus of these two very different ideologies. They were still constructing a record demonstrating that their cooperation was worth having, and that the legal rights and safety of women workers were worth supporting during times of strike, and something that League members could take pride in, but the "overt discrimination and indifference" that "did not immediately shake the league's faith in the labor movement or weaken its conviction that its rightful place was as a subordinate of the AFL" (*As Sisters* 83) had begun to wear on League members, motivating them not to abandon labor entirely, but to seek to build up other coalitions in addition to the ones they still attempted to maintain with labor, in order to promote the well-being of women workers.

Financial Cooperation

The League's financial cooperation with various groups made their identity-balancing act very clear, as well, as they attempted to work out over time just who qualified to receive money

from their strike fund, who was worth sending out a letter of appeal to their members, and who merited an on-the-spot collection from those attending a meeting. One of the clearest examples of what was at stake in these negotiations, however, can be found by looking at the League's union label work. Throughout the wider labor movement, these labels were popular but problematic, which contributed to the League's conflicted stance on them. On the one hand, David Montgomery points out that "to Gompers, the union label had provided the most appropriate instrument for the gradual diffusion of union standards," with even his opponents religiously shopping only for label goods even as they inveighed against the too-eager distribution of labels to items made by workers only the most skilled of whom were organized (278). On the other hand, Orleck notes that mainstream Socialist theory generally ignored or rejected the connection between production and consumption, leaving it to women like Clara Lemlich to try to mobilize women consumers "as a wing of the working-class movement" (27). Within the League, however, the label was championed by Elizabeth Dutcher, an ally and a Socialist Party member, who claimed that the Socialist Party supported her Central Label Union Council (Reel 1 0799). The mixed appeal of the label continued as it found support among middle-class women, including some League members, which is not surprising given that consumption was such a big part of what such women were expected to do, and promoting and shopping for the union label allowed them to infuse that consumption with a greater social purpose. The label, then, in many ways embodied the conflict described by Montgomery of an "ideology of acquisitive individualism, which explained and justified a society regulated by market mechanism and propelled by the accumulation of capital . . . challenged by an ideology of mutualism, rooted in working-class bondings and struggles" (171). In other words, the label

involved labor, manufacturers, and consumers working together to attempt to use market forces to promote practices that would benefit organized workers, but the tensions inherent in that mixed alliance frequently led to problems.

When we see the League trying to decide what role the label should play in their overall work, therefore, we are seeing them coming to terms with a clear intersection of the many factions with which they were always attempting to work, but the seeming common ground shared by all of those championing the label was not very stable. In June of 1909, we see the League trying to appease Dutcher by assuring her that it is her committee's business to push the label with manufacturers and the purchasing public while the League at large remains focused on direct organizational work. Granted, they did try to wrest control of the committee's finances from her, demonstrating that they understand the power implications of being able to control the pursestrings and weren't so sure that Dutcher was the right person to trust with them. Nevertheless, in the midst of their attempts to reassure this one ally of their cooperation with her, she is accusing other allies of not being committed enough to the label because they had failed to purchase the shirtwaists she was selling regardless of whether or not they "suited them" (Reel 1 0466), which means that like so many issues facing the League, it didn't break down along strictly class lines. They joined her Central Label Union Council in 1911 (Reel 1 0801), but wouldn't contribute to it financially beyond allowing them the use of their meeting hall (Reel 1 0745), expecting them to pay for the printing if they wanted something included in the League's bulletin (Reel 1 1085). This illustrates the League's ambivalence towards the label and their careful thought regarding how they ought to relate to it.

In September of 1910, for example, we see the League attempting to use the Label Committee for a different purpose in response to a complaint from a League member who reported that the women in her local of the Textile Workers' paid dues but were not allowed a vote. The Label Committee was asked to investigate whether or not the Textile Workers Label ought to be on the products made by the member's factory, considering that disfranchisement of the women was tantamount to them being unorganized, and ought, in the League's eyes, to result in their work being disqualified for the union label (Reel 1 0614). This assessment of what counts as an organized shop would no doubt have been at odds with Samuel Gompers opinion on the matter, who seemed to wink at the practices of unions like the boot and shoe workers and United Garment Workers who were happy to pass out labels for items made by unorganized female operatives (Montgomery 278), but it shows the League trying to maneuver their support of the label into a form that better supported their ideological commitment to women. Had they been successful in doing so, it seems likely that they would have continued to fight for the spread of the label, as it's appeal to so many groups with whom the League wished to work made it a desirable site for finding common ground. Based on their calculated retreat from label work over the next few years, however, it seems that they ultimately decided that their time and resources could be better spent in other areas that would have a more direct positive impact on the lives of working women. Even in that retreat, however, we can see signs of their continued diplomacy, dissolving their Label Committee in 1913 lest they "conflict with the work of the Central Union Label Council" (Reel 2 0141-0142), and only resigning from that council in 1917 after their lessened involvement had gone on for sometime without raising comment (Reel 2 0566).

Legislative and Political Cooperation

Finally, we can see the more nuanced metaphor of the League's balancing of multiple possible identities by looking at how the League spoke about their turn toward seeking more legislative solutions in addition to direct organization. Now, Dye has argued that:

The WTUL's emphasis on legislation signified important changes in the organization's identity. By embracing the solution of compensatory legislation, by formulating its own rationale for protective laws and by opposing the labor movement (for organized labor disapproved of several important legislative proposals until the 1920s), the league shifted its ideological orientation away from an emphasis on women as workers to be integrated into the labor movement to one on women workers as women, with special needs, disadvantages, and weaknesses. Like the league's participation in the suffrage campaign, its members' fight for legal protection indicated their alignment with feminism at the expense of their original commitment to the American Federation of Labor. (*As Sisters* 140)

While I don't disagree with her assessment completely, I do think it downplays both the League's own explanations for their initial forays into legislation and what they hoped to accomplish through it. To illustrate, I need to make a closer examination of the following passage from March of 1911, the same month as the Triangle Shirtwaist fire:

In the past the League has concentrated its effort upon direct organization work; but gradually it has become evident that the courts and legislature were instruments which though apparently unrelated or indirectly related to organization have a very important influence upon the efforts to organize.

It was a recognition of the possibility of using this influence as a helpful rather than a restricting and hampering one as it had been in the past that actuated the League in adding the Legislative Committee to its number of standing committees. (Reel 1 0722)

This explanation counters the idea that the League saw themselves as turning from direct organization to legislation, claiming instead that they see legislation as a necessary first step to make organization easier.

Jacoby dealt with this idea, noting that “the American WTUL advocated protective legislation as a necessary underpinning to the unionization of women workers, since it too recognized that their long hours, low wages, and miserable working conditions impeded their entry into the labor movement” (119). As even Dye notes in regard to Rose Schneiderman, “at no time did she say that protective laws were preferable to organization. Rather, she stressed that her own experiences and perceptions had taught her that legislation was necessary” (*As Sisters* 152). While Dye cites the League members’ frustration with their attempts to organize women workers and get them incorporated into a labor movement that was perpetually disinclined to accept them as why legislation was necessary, Orleck argues that another factor may have had a more visceral effect on their efforts. She claims specifically for the four women she is discussing, though it is likely true for many of the League members who were present at the time, that the Triangle Shirtwaist fire forever changed their thinking in regard to their work, stating that “memories of the charred victims haunted them throughout their careers, reminding them that women workers could not wait for change. They adopted what they called the ‘common sense of working women’ in their approach toward social change: Whatever route was the quickest, whichever path seemed most promising, they would take” (Orleck 5). She goes on to note of their

opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment that they opposed it “not because they didn’t care about equality but because they feared it would endanger laws protecting women workers. If their position on the matter was short-sighted, it was because images of sweatshops and industrial accidents blocked their vision” (6).

Certainly by Orleck’s assessment, the turn towards legislation does not appear so much as a rejection of labor in order to embrace feminism — the kind of legislation they supported tended to be at odds with the goals of mainstream, middle-class feminism of the time, after all — but rather as a desperate attempt to diversify their efforts in order to protect women now, rather than at some later date when they had finally reformed labor men, winning them over to the same value for women workers that League members embraced. That diversity of approach sometimes meant direct organization, sometimes it meant independent campaigns for protective legislation, and sometimes it meant partnering with feminist groups to work for suffrage. What we lose by thinking in the dichotomous terms of labor organization or feminist reform group is the autonomous League, with members choosing among their range of identities again and again to form coalitions that are expedient for the task at hand, even if the ideology of the group with whom they are partnering doesn’t align perfectly with that of the League, as certainly both labor organizations and feminist reform groups failed to do, as we have seen and will continue to explore.

Solidarity

I can continue to explore this theme of the range of identities the League employed in their rhetorical posturing as I move on to a discussion of solidarity. First, I will look at how the League used affirmations to strike a balance between the attributes of individual members and

the League as a whole. Next, I will look at the League's demand for reciprocal representation within their associations in order to gain a clearer understanding of how the League saw itself in relation to the labor movement. Finally, I will consider those times when the League's ability to overcome certain barriers to their solidarity was best bolstered by the resignations of key members.

Solidarity as Affirmation

I like to think of many of the examples I included in this section as the League's positive inner-monologue, the uplifting self-talk that, to paraphrase an old SNL skit, encouraged them to believe that they were good enough, smart enough, and gosh-darn-it, people liked them. In their optimism, we get another view of the connections that the League was trying to establish, and trying to convince themselves they were succeeding in establishing, with various groups, but we also get an interesting glimpse into the role of individuals in creating the identity of the League that deserves more attention than it got in the midst of all of their other affirming rhetoric. What it boils down to is the balance that the League tries to strike between claiming credit for the oratorical and organizational skills of their individual members, and drawing a distinguishing line between their League activities and personal activities. To illustrate, in October of 1910, the League is happy to report that the Workingmen's State Federation Convention sent a letter "thanking the League for sending Miss O'Reilly and expressing their appreciation of her value to the convention" (Reel 1 0620-0621) and in September of 1912 that "Mrs Heaffely reported that the Neckwear Makers were grateful to the League for sending Miss Schneiderman" (Reel 1 1053). In both cases, these affirmations are included in the minutes, rather than just being read to

individuals mentioned, because their actions were seen as an extension of the League, therefore, the gratitude they inspired belonged to the League as much as to them.

At other times, however, the League was careful to separate themselves from the actions of their individual members. On the one hand, because the League had incorporated this separation was a legal reality, but I am more interested in the rhetorical effect of keeping some of their individual actions separate from their corporate actions, particularly because this parallels their philosophy of coalition building with other groups. Just as they don't ask that the labor or feminist groups with which they work align with them perfectly in every ideological aspect, though they would appreciate it if they could just organize their clerical staff, they don't ask that their individual members refrain from participating in activities outside of the ideological ken of the League, though they do ask that they not claim to be acting as the representative of the League if they don't, in fact, have the League's sanction to be doing whatever it is they are doing. Their clearest statement of this position came in September of 1918, during which they discuss Board members' political activities now that they have the right to vote, and decide that "officers of the League shall be free to work for any candidate and act on any committee, so long as they do not do it as officials of the League" (Reel 2 0648-0649).

The lesson to be gained from this position, is that it is easier to maintain harmony within a coalition when the standard for participation falls somewhere below universal solidarity. To better illustrate this lesson, it will be helpful to come at it from a different direction. I have already stated that the women with whom the League worked were predominantly immigrants, or the children of immigrants, with strong ethnic and religious ties that often put them at odds with the much more homogenous make-up of the AFL branch of the labor movement. A.T. Lane

explores this tension between new immigrants and the “American” workers who were several more generations out from their immigration to the country, stating that “the newcomers had to earn the solidarity of American workers by willingly accepting American values and conforming to American standards. If they were incapable of that, they should be denied entry” (64). This demand for assimilation was draining, as Lane further notes that “the continuing large volume of raw recruits to American industry from the rural areas of Europe meant that the task of breaking down barriers had to be completed again and again. It is not surprising that American labor preferred intensified restriction to the herculean task of forming unified economic organizations from such ethnically diverse peoples” (153). What Lane saw in relation to immigration laws, however, can be applied to the League’s policy of multiculturalism, except that where labor opted to try to stop the entry of those who couldn’t or wouldn’t fall into line with their values and practices, the League decided to turn a blind eye to many of the private practices of their members, allowing them to remain members of the Socialist Party, for instance, despite their conflicted group relationship with them. Of course, they did engage in some assimilation work through their English classes and their association with the Immigration Council, but in general, they thought it best to keep their demands for conformity to a minimum, which enabled them to maintain a more diverse membership. Greater diversity could lead to greater conflict, of course, but it also gave them a wider range of identities and affiliations on which to draw.

Solidarity as Affiliation

In this next section, I’d like to look at what they did demand out of their associations with other groups. Doing so will further illustrate how the League worked to negotiate the demands of class and feminism right from the start, through a series of changing rhetorical postures of

solidarity that emphasized different aspects of both in order to build up the League's coalitions and sense of identity. The key to this negotiation was their demand for reciprocal representation. This type of representation was a departure from the kind that women's organizations within the labor movement were used to experiencing. For example, the League is happy to report in November of 1907 that the White Goods Workers now have one of their own acting as their president where they had previously "had a representative of the Hebrew Trades presiding at their meetings" (Reel 1 0270-0271). This practice of having men fill the more public roles in women's unions was rooted in Victorian notions of appropriate behavior for women, with Montgomery noting that many women "preferred the practice developed in the Cohoes Strikes of 1881 and 1882: They did the negotiating, while male officers made public statements. This arrangement conformed to accepted gender roles, and it saved textile workers from the frequent threat of discharge that could result from too much publicity" (160-61). Now, there were other motivations for allowing men to dominate such meetings that I will get into shortly, but for now it is enough to note that the League was looking for something different in the alliances they made, and encouraged the unions they organized to make.

Essentially, they wanted reciprocal representation that reinforced the idea that the bodies participating in it were equals. We saw many examples of the League's ready compliance with requests for delegates to various conferences and conventions of Central Bodies or unions. While they were willing to send fraternal delegates (Reel 1 0576) when that was all they could get, they preferred those times when they were granted both vote and voice (Reel 1 0614). Additionally, as I have noted, they came to expect having representatives of the League appointed on strike councils before they would engage significantly with unions during times of strikes, as with the

Cloak Makers, for instance (Reel 1 0610), as they deemed that becoming financial partners with them ought to allow them greater knowledge of and even say in how those funds were to be spent. They further complied with a request of the Waist Makers Union in June of 1910 “that three members of the League be appointed to serve on the Executive Board of the Waist Makers Union” (Reel 1 0593). This practice is a little tricky to justify, as the appointment came after the general strike had ended and appears more as an attempt on the part of the League to bring the East Side union practices they disapproved of into closer line with their preferred AFL business methods. I say tricky because of the League’s response to a similar request for three representatives from an outside group to similarly serve on their Executive Board.

The League encouraged unions to send their delegates to League meetings and conventions so that they could weigh in on the League’s direction. They stopped short, however, of complying with the April of 1911 request of the Secretary of the Central Federated Union that the League have three of the CFU’s representatives on their Executive Board, stating that “while the C.F.U. appreciated the work of the League he thought that mistakes could be avoided by having members of the C.F.U. on the Executive Board of the League.” The League responded as follows: “A motion was carried that the monthly bulletin be sent to the secretaries of the Central Bodies stating that they would always be welcome at the meetings of the League” (Reel 1 0744). This simultaneously indignant and evasive response indicates that they feel the sting of the implied belittlement of the League’s leadership abilities, an assessment they disagree with, but can hardly loudly protest given their practice of serving on the Executive Board of the Waist Makers Union. Even in their uncomfortable denial, however, they seek to build up the sort of

coalition they desire and value by encouraging continued communication with the Central Bodies, albeit on their terms.

Barriers to Solidarity

The last concept I'd like to examine in this section is the idea that sometimes, the only way forward for the League's coalitions was to accept individual resignations. Our focus thus far has been on the ways that League members found to overcome their differences by ignoring certain divisive elements of them and focusing on their areas of commonality. There were times, however, when the path to their continued solidarity within the group was paved by the disappearance of certain members. While there were cases of members being expelled for their public statements disparaging the League or, like Elizabeth Dutcher, left in a huff over not getting their way one time too many, what I have in mind here are the more peaceful departures that grew out of changes in the alignment of the values and directions of the League at large and individual members. While most of the resignations from the League were dealt with specifically under sisterhood, I'm mentioning them here because several of the biggest barriers to League solidarity dissipated when these members left.

For instance, while Dye talks about Helen Marot, "who resigned as secretary in 1913, [and] did not figure in league affairs by the time of the war" and Melinda Scott, who "had resigned as the league's president in 1917 to work as a United Textile Workers organizer" (*As Sisters* 150), in terms of how their absence made the transition to protective legislation easier as they had both opposed such measures, I would argue that they also alleviated much of the strife within the League that had been created by their desire to focus on organizing "American" women. Orleck described the turmoil as follows:

For Schneiderman and Newman, Marot's not-so-subtle stereotyping of Jewish immigrants was a painful betrayal. When Marot announced in the summer of 1911 that she would keep the League's doors open to Jewish women on 'a basis approved by American trade unionists,' Schneiderman took that as a direct attack on her work as the League's chief organizer. She toyed with the idea of quitting, but she was in the middle of organizing women in the white goods and kimono trades. So she swallowed her anger and stayed on. But Newman never forgave Marot. More than half a century later she told an interviewer that her former friend was a cold woman who displayed neither affection nor emotion. (68)

Schneiderman didn't resign at that point, but when the Executive Board officially decided to more or less abandon their efforts on the East Side, she resigned as organizer (*As Sisters* 116), and the conflicts that arose out of this move away from Jewish workers continued in the bitterly contested presidential contest in 1914 between Schneiderman and Melinda Scott, the uptown organizer among native-born women workers. Despite the fact that both women were working-class unionists, their support in the League divided almost exactly along class and ethnic lines, seriously threatening the continued cohesion of the League (*As Sisters* 117). While the League did continue to function in the face of these conflicts, that functioning became smoother once Marot and Scott had faded from the foreground and Schneiderman once more resumed a leadership role, taking over as president after Scott resigned.

Similarly, the League faced major divisions when they found they could not agree on the desirability of a women's minimum wage. Now, in our previous discussion of the League's November of 1914 debate regarding minimum wage, I noted that the record attempted to

minimize the divide by not naming names as to which side members were on and attempting to come up with a fair and reasonable solution to figure out their next move, but it is worth noting now that, according to Dye's further investigations, Schneiderman and Newman were in favor of the measures while Scott and Marot were against them, indicating once more that their decisions to step back from League work left behind a remaining membership that was more in agreement with one another (*As Sisters* 147). By this token, of course, had Schneiderman decided to step down permanently, and the others remained, the direction of the League might have been significantly different moving forward, which underscores the importance of individuals, and their allegiances, in the overall identity creation of a given group.

Continual resignations whenever anyone didn't agree in the slightest, naturally, would not have been a tenable solution for overcoming difference, but turnover in membership did occur throughout the history of the League, and it was a sign of the strength of their rhetorical posturing that they could continue to recruit new members who shared some portion of their vision for the uplift of women workers through collective action. Elizabeth Clemens gives some credit for this type of continued existence to the structure of the League that encouraged such things as the very meeting minutes I have been examining. As she states it, "formal organization transforms a network of interpersonal ties into a system of roles and routines. New members are more easily integrated and expansive campaigns more easily coordinated. In addition, the establishment of formal organizations creates a new kind of social network — ties between organizations, constituted through either formal alliances or the joint membership of individuals" ("Securing" 615). While I think this concept is certainly worth further consideration, it is sufficient for now to grant that the League maintained a balance between the continuity of their

structure and the fluidity of their membership that enabled them to emerge more unified after certain resignations, and, in the case of those that heightened tension, such as Mary Dreier's 1914 resignation from the presidency which necessitated the controversial presidential contest mentioned above, to nonetheless survive the resulting storms.

Sisterhood

I turn now to the League's rhetorical postures of sisterhood, and here, too, I will try to get at the range of possible identities that they employed and try to avoid reducing our discussion to the false dichotomy of class versus gender, even as I necessarily must discuss both. I will do this by first examining how their empowerment of women as leaders fit into their commitment to organization even as it conflicted with the practices of the AFL they so devotedly swore allegiance to in the beginning. I will then turn our attention to the League's version of feminism with an eye towards how it sometimes aligned them with the wider woman movement and other times alienated them from it. Finally, in looking at their use of sisterhood in their suffrage work, rather than rehash themes that have been covered by others interested in the movement, I want to turn our attention to an interesting rhetorical use of space that it highlights, finishing our discussion with a consideration of some of the physical constraints that made the organization of women difficult and which made the League's work that much more valuable.

Women as Leaders

At this point, we have seen repeated examples of the League's insistence that the women in the unions they helped to organize run their own affairs rather than allowing male coworkers or labor representatives to do it for them. To illustrate, in November of 1907, we read that they "have insisted on their managing their own meetings and their strike themselves, simply getting

advice and co-operation from others. This was in marked comparison to the men who had come to help them. They had started the idea among the girls that they must have a leader. It was interesting to see how the girls took up the idea of being their own leaders and how their interest increased as they elected different people on different committees” (Reel 1 0271-0272). Dye and Jacoby each present a slightly different explanation for this insistence. Dye notes that “the WTUL stressed that in order to be successful unionists, women needed training in self-assertion. To counter traditional feminine passivity, league members insisted that women elect officers, chair meetings, and make decisions without assistance from male co-workers or relatives” (*As Sisters* 70), and goes on to state that “a woman who learned to be a dutiful and submissive daughter at home, league members emphasized, could hardly be a militant unionist at work” (*As Sisters* 73). Jacoby, on the other hand, focuses on the idea that “female trade unionists’ reliance on male leadership stemmed in part from their ignorance of procedures. Women were unaccustomed to running meetings, were unfamiliar with parliamentary procedure, and were inexperienced in dealing with the financial affairs of organizations. In addition, they rarely had the political and economic knowledge or experience to be confident about conducting negotiations with their employers” (Jacoby 30-31).

Whether their reliance on male leaders resulted from simple inexperience or the gender expectations of their day, or, what’s more likely, a related combination of the two, the League was particularly well-suited to help them become more self-reliant through their knowledge of parliamentary procedure and the rest, precisely because they were a women’s group, with allies who had participated in other iterations of the club movement. As Anne Firor Scott argues, as women worked together in these clubs, “they learned how to organize, administer, handle money,

speak in public, deal with legislatures, deal with each other. The societies were miniature republics in which to learn about politics. For many women the result was a new self-image, a new self-confidence” (178). In this regard, it is unsurprising that League members would be so eager to share the gains they had received through such experiences with the women they came in contact with, though it is interesting that the League’s commitment to teaching working women to run their own affairs did not preclude them negotiating for them with employers, as they reported doing for the White Goods Workers in the Annual Report from 1907-1908 (Reel 22 0007). The difference, it would seem, between their interventions and the ones from labor men that they opposed, was that they saw their help as a stop-gap measure on the road to the women’s full empowerment, while the men seemed to feel that they ought to be leading indefinitely.

This brings us to the problem of the League’s early promotion of women’s leadership in the face of union opposition, however. As we have seen, the AFL gave lip service to the equality of women and the need for suffrage, but in practice, they continued to treat women as subordinates. Dye claims they felt that “women workers were daughters, sisters, and future wives, not fellow workers” (*As Sisters* 29). The League’s promotion of women as leaders, therefore, put them at odds with labor and seemed to place them in league with the woman movement. But allegiances were not so clear cut. On the one hand, it was not as if the labor men were always imposing their leadership on women who violently resented them: Jacoby notes that “women trade unionists tended to play passive and subordinate roles in union meetings, elected men to lead and represent them, and sometimes even passed up opportunities to improve their position in the labor force” (30). Union men were not the only ones who thought of these women in terms of their family roles first and as workers second; they often viewed themselves as such

and were reluctant to take on the “unladylike” traits of a union leader. Additionally, the type of leadership that League members were most often seeking only went so far as putting women in authority over other women or in cooperation with men without placing them in charge of men, which meant, again, that they were generally only asking labor men to live up to their stated principles and not asking for the identity in treatment that the feminists of the 1920s would demand. Indeed, Orleck comments that “Schneiderman was not challenging the idea of difference. On the contrary, she believed in difference. She had always argued that union organizers in female-dominated trades needed to tailor their approach to women” (Orleck 104).

In many ways, then, it is more useful to think of the League as sitting at the nexus of the labor movement, the woman movement, and traditional notions of femininity, acting as a safe haven for women who were learning to lead faster than union men were learning to allow them to do so. In the face of such men as Mr. Elstein of the Ladies Garment Workers who freely admitted in August of 1912 that “if we should now work even with representatives in a general strike that the union would be carried on and controlled by the men, and the women would have no place and power, and probably mostly no voice (Reel 1 1031-1032), League members could take comfort, as Dye points out, in “the companionship of women who shared many of the same concerns and experiences. In the overwhelmingly male world of early twentieth-century unions, such a female network was of incalculable value for personal support. Then, too, the league gave women more opportunities for leadership and responsibility and far more experience as organizers and negotiators than unions did” (*As Sisters* 118). The balance they struck was to work “to bring women into places of responsibility in the organization of their trade” (Reel 1 1031-1032), without trying to overhaul the definition of which trades were women’s and with a

seeming eventual acceptance that labor men were not yet ready to welcome women as their complete equals in the workforce.

Relationships Among and Understanding of Women

At this point, then, I need to take a little time to discuss just what the League's feminism and conception of sisterhood looked like and how it fit in with the wider woman movement of their day so that I can continue to fill out our understanding of their range of possible identities. As noted above of Schneiderman, and discussed in chapter three, the feminism espoused by League members was one based in the idea of women's difference from men, both emotionally and culturally, as well as physically. Because of this difference, women were uniquely suited to relate to one another. As Dye claims, then, "a conviction that women could relate to one another across class lines in the spirit of sisterhood and an emphasis on the special qualities that women shared linked the league to the larger woman movement" and she goes on to note that "league members used the term *sisterhood* to convey the idea that class was less important than gender for understanding women's status. The primary social dichotomy was a sex distinction rooted in differences between men and women. Women, league members believed, shared distinct emotional qualities: they were more gentle and moral than men, more sensitive and responsive to human needs. They were, in short, instinctively maternal (*As Sisters* 46).

Despite this claim for the primacy of gender in League members' sense of themselves, we have seen examples of times when, even in the midst of working for women's suffrage, they emphasized the demands of class over gender, or at least gave them equal billing in their concerns. One reason for this was that, just as League members had been let down by labor men who failed to live up to the ideals of class solidarity when it came to women workers, many

middle- and upper-class women let them down when they failed to live up to the ideals of sisterhood across class or ethnic lines. The clearest example of this can be found in the League's December of 1915 description of Melinda Scott and Mary Dreier's trip to Meridan, Connecticut, during which they were unable to interest a single clubwoman of the town to work on behalf of the many striking women, whom they described in glowing terms (Reel 2 0460). The disappointment they expressed made clear that they believed that sisterhood should have motivated a better response, but the results instead showed the limitations of rhetorical appeals to sisterhood. Essentially, in working with these women, League members came to realize that they needed to have more than one rhetorical trick up their sleeve in order to garner the support they needed to forward the interests of working women. This is not so surprising given the awareness that Orleck claimed many working women had, stating that "rubbing elbows with the mink brigade did not blind workers to the class-determined limits of sisterhood. How far they were from the protected status of more affluent women was made abundantly clear by the violence they encountered at the hands of police and company guards and by the fact that the mink brigades were able to end police brutality simply by joining the picket lines" (Orleck 62). While middle- and upper-class women might remain blind to the class-based distinctions that remained between them and working-class women, the reverse was not true due to the harsh realities of the industrial workplace.

Those same realities put the League even further at odds with the feminism that began to emerge late in the period under examination. This new feminism, best symbolized by the Equal Rights Amendment, wanted all women to receive identical treatment to men under the law. Based on that desire, they opposed the sort of protective legislation that League members had

long fought to secure. One of the reasons the League had championed these measures was the idea that:

women entered the labor force with social and biological disadvantages. Women, the reformers argued, were primarily future wives and mothers. Most would never work long enough to be interested in unionism. Women were physically weaker than men: their reproductive systems put them at a serious disadvantage in the labor force. These inherent disadvantages made women more vulnerable than men to exploitation. Thus, women could never be 'equal' in industry without state assistance. (*As Sisters* 141)

Indeed, as Jacoby points out, "genuinely sympathetic to the problems facing women seeking access to professional jobs, the WTUL considered protective legislation to be in the best interests of the majority of women workers, who, as far as the league was concerned, suffered more acutely from being exploited in jobs they already held than from being excluded from jobs they might like to hold" (Jacoby 142). The trouble, as Robyn Muncy points out, was that "women reformers thus won a Progressive end - government intervention in the economy on behalf of workers - by perpetuating an older belief in male/female difference and moreover inscribing that difference into law" (69).

So, despite the fact that league members were inclined to believe in sisterhood across class lines, with young women workers in particular "moved by the idea of sisterhood. It meshed with the bonding they saw in the marketplaces and in their neighborhoods. Even more profoundly, it captured their own experiences in the sex-segregated shops where they worked" (Orleck 35), the League found that sisterhood alone couldn't achieve the ends they were hoping for. As Jacoby points out, "ironically, it was the middle-class feminists whose conscious

and unconscious sense of class limited the achievement of cross-class female solidarity. As a result, the WTUL did considerably more for the American women's movement than the women's movement did for the WTUL and the cause of women workers" (Jacoby 86-87). Furthermore, even among women workers, the League found that their efforts at protective legislation were not universally welcomed, which seemed to bewilder them, as evidenced by their reactions to the workers from Typographical Local No. 6 (Reel 2 0607). My point, however, is not to fault them for the insufficiency of one version of sisterhood to apply universally, but to highlight that they had to focus on different aspects of that sisterhood in order to successfully act as the liaison between working women and the suffrage movement, taking on "the dual responsibility of conveying the significance of the suffrage issue to working-class audiences and representing the needs and opinions of working women to the overwhelmingly middle-class, native-born movement" (*As Sisters* 130). While their execution was not always perfect, and they could be short-sighted in their pursuit of protective legislation, League members did find ways to adapt the work of suffrage to meet the ideological demands of their organization work, and they did manage to describe suffrage to workers, both male and female, that helped win them over to the cause, exercising once more a flexible range within their rhetorical postures.

Suffrage Campaign

Finally, I would like to very briefly mention the idea that one other aspect of the League's rhetorical work within sisterhood had to do with physical space. Now, I mentioned in my literature review that one area of interest for recent rhetorical scholarship is represented by Nan Johnson's *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910*, which explored the idea that women's access to traditional oratory was limited by notions of feminine and masculine

spaces. Jacoby notes a similar problem when she argues that “a farther obstacle to the organization of women was the lack of places where they could meet; union meetings were often held in pubs or social halls where women felt neither comfortable nor welcome. A major activity of both the British and American Women’s Trade Union Leagues was finding and renting places where women could meet with other women workers or with male coworkers or employers” (5). In this light, the examples I mentioned regarding the League’s continuing offer of hospitality to groups of working women looks less like middle-class ineptitude and more like an answer to a legitimate and pressing need. Indeed, sprinkled throughout the examples presented are instances of the impact of available space on the outcome of various endeavors, but let’s focus on a few related to suffrage, which is, after all, in many ways about granting women access to spaces of power like the ballot box and the chambers of government.

Now, we saw in June of 1912 that the League only grudgingly allowed the use of their available space to Leonora O’Reilly and her Wage Earner’s Suffrage League if it was not engaged, with the comment that it was a bad time to have a meeting as their much more important labor meeting devoted to listening to the great Carl Legien was happening the next day (Reel 1 1012), though they did approve in September the Wage Earner’s League being “given the use of the Assembly Room once a month for the next three months” (Reel 1 1056), and they had, in fact, given over the bulk of the space in their May Bulletin to the Wage Earner’s League Suffrage Parade Committee the previous April (Reel 1 0961). As their commitment to suffrage work increased, so did their willingness to give their suffrage committees physical space in which to work, as in 1915 when they gave over their Assembly room to them for an entire month (Reel 2 0414). Of course, in addition to making their own spaces available for use, the League

used its connections to labor to open up other physical spaces otherwise denied to woman suffragists, by giving credentials to women like Maggie Hinchey so that she could appear before unions and explain the need for the ballot (Reel 2 0187).

Implications for Future Research

Of course, much more could be said about the League's rhetorical use of space, certainly in relation to their acts of hospitality and the great pains they went to in order to secure various houses to act as offices for them, but, speaking of space, this dissertation has already taken up as much as it is entitled to, so I will turn instead to the implications for future research that this project has raised. One key issue that arose for me as this dissertation progressed, yet I was unable to address, is the need for a more theoretically grounded understanding of the role of formal organization, as evidenced by common club practices embodied in the dictates of *Robert's Rules of Order*, on the actual cohesion and effectiveness of various reform groups, including the League. Social Science and Business Management scholars have devoted a fair amount of energy to working out organizational theory, but it has yet to be fully applied to such groups with an eye toward both function and rhetorical effectiveness. The closest such effort that I could find is the work of Elizabeth Clemens. She attempts to expand our understanding of organizational theory by pointing out its imperfect fit with women's organizations prior to the granting of suffrage. For example, she states that while organizational theory claims that people will choose a type of group based on efficacy, there are other factors at play like "logics of appropriateness" ("Organizational" 758) that lead, for example, to the forming of a voluntary association to address the economic and political needs of working women. Additionally, she argued elsewhere for the impact on how a cause is received by the type of organization

representing it, noting that “although the care of the infirm and the moral education of children might be the objects of either a woman’s club or a local Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the public identities of these organizations gave distinctive meanings to their efforts.

Organizations anchor meaning” (“Securing” 615) and “although a single issue such as suffrage could be advocated by multiple associations, suffrage pursued by a temperance organization meant something different than suffrage pursued by clubwomen who had a public presence concerning issues of social welfare and ‘cities beautiful’” (“Securing” 628).

I appreciate the work she is trying to accomplish in these essays, and I found some of her insights helpful, insofar as they reinforced what I believed I was seeing in my data, but there are several shortcomings in her theories, as well as in the execution of my own, that could be addressed by future scholars. To illustrate, much like the scholars who have dealt with the League in terms of their failure to find a perfectly balanced answer to the demands of class and gender, Clemens falls prey to the temptation to lament the failure of the suffrage era woman movement to create coalitions that would outlast the granting of suffrage and continue working as one to forward the cause of women. Her criticism takes an interesting form:

Whether in pursuit of social legislation, or in promotion of the arts and public institutions, women’s associations made major contributions to the infrastructure of state intervention and civic life. Yet, to stop with a celebration of the accomplishments of these women’s organizations would leave a distorted picture of the relationship between social capital and political mobilization. By enrolling informal networks into associations and associations into coalitions, organizers also incorporated sources of potential schism within the web of group affiliations. (“Securing” 627)

Essentially, she is arguing that the fact that these coalitions at their core were based on social relationships among individual women, the diversity of those individuals and the inevitable disagreements among them meant that the coalition contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

In making this argument, however, I believe she is missing the point. Her criticism is coming from the perspective that the goal of these coalitions was an enduring connection tying associations together indefinitely, but I would argue that their actual goal was to achieve a specific end. Clemens laments that, “carefully knit together during the decades of struggle for suffrage, the web of affiliation linking women’s associations proved fragile when confronted with world events and competing organizational identities” (620), but one wonders why these organizations which came together specifically to achieve women’s suffrage should be expected to continue together once that end had been achieved. Clemens goes on to say that:

this double existence of the woman movement — its presences as both a network of individuals and of organizations — offered opportunities as well as dangers for the construction of a broad alliance in favor of woman suffrage. The existence of multiple organizations committed to a particular cause created a strategic space in which activists could choose ‘which kind of woman’ would be perceived as supporting a particular cause. But almost every individual activist confronted competing loyalties; the commitments of one organization might strain activists’ ties to another, disrupting the broader network of affiliation. (“Securing” 637)

If we think of all of these individuals and associations as circles to be incorporated into a Venn diagram, Clemens seems to be asking that they all achieve perfect alignment, with only one

circle visible containing all of the necessary support for a unified cause, or at least regretting that such is not possible, but experience would teach us that to manage even a partial and temporary overlap of different circles leading toward the achievement of some specific goal is difficult enough, and worthy of emulation. The differences among individuals and associations is a given considering the great diversity of humanity; the question is whether or not associations and coalitions can overcome those differences sufficiently to accomplish anything together. The missing ingredient in Clemens' assessment is an understanding of and appreciation for the flexible nature of the associations among groups that can be formed one season and radically recombined another.

If future scholars were to combine her efforts at understanding how organizational theory must change in order to explain the actions of non-dominant groups with my attempts to illustrate the flexible use of identity toward coalition building that goes on in the records of those groups, we would have a much better understanding of how rhetorically effective coalitions geared toward social change are built and function. This work seems crucial as we face a world that seems to be splintered into special interest groups and boutique news sources that allow us to never encounter, and therefore never strive to find common ground with, those who disagree with us in any way. The result is a political quagmire in which little is ever accomplished except by those who have the resources to buy their desired result. Any study that might help us to find ways of forming meaningful coalitions to address issues like rising income inequality and the sudden personhood of corporations would certainly be welcome. On a less political note, there are still plenty of unexplored spaces in the archives of other women's groups, particularly from the 1920s, 30s, and 40s that are still awaiting the scrutinizing gaze of rhetoric scholars to fill in

the gaps in our knowledge regarding just what women were using their words to accomplish during the seemingly quiet time between suffrage and Betty Friedan. As Scott points out, even though women's clubs "tended to operate within the prevailing social norms, yet by their very existence - and especially when they have been effective - they have helped to change those norms" (180). I'd certainly like to know more about where the boundaries were being pushed during those decades.

Conclusion

In the end, Dye lamented that "League members were unable to develop a satisfactory solution to the problem of women's dual exploitation: were women workers oppressed because they were workers or because they were female?" ("Creating" 27), but I believe this misses the point entirely. The answer to her either/or question is yes; they were exploited as a result of both, and any solution that wished to lessen their exploitation would have to take both causes into account. It's true that the League never managed to perfectly harmonize a program to simultaneously and completely address both the demands of class and of feminism, but they did manage to create a series of temporary and changing alliances that did address both to some degree. This shouldn't be surprising; the very diversity of the women with whom the League was attempting to work should be a clue that a one-size-fits-all solution would be impossible to find. Coalition is easy if one is attempting to unite a homogenous group, but the League existed specifically to address the needs of the women and immigrants who did not fit the mold for the typical American unionist at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result, they faced the gargantuan task of finding a way to balance at the nexus of many competing groups, appeasing

and cajoling them all by turns in order to achieve some improvement in the working experiences of wage-earning women.

Such complex problems generally demand complex solutions, and if one is trying to address those problems through the work of a coalition rather than as an individual addressing like-minded individuals, they will also demand a complex rhetorical strategy, with the ability to find snatches of common ideological ground, or the illusion of it, on which to stand with many different groups. Whatever their faults in perfectly ingratiating the concerns of women into the labor movement or the problems of the working-class into the woman movement, the League certainly accomplished those moments of alignment many times in their endeavors to improve the lives of the working women of the greater New York area, mastering the art of rhetorical posturing, as we have seen, in order to engage their own members, creating fictions of unity that they could identify with and embrace, if only temporarily. Returning finally to Prelli, these records have made clear how the League was able again and again to “contingently resolve” tensions “through those selective processes” involved in rhetorical displays, and I hope my analysis has highlighted “how those situated resolutions conceal even as they reveal, what meanings they leave absent even as they make others present, whose interests they mute as well as whose they emphasize, what they condemn as well as celebrate” (11).

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Vita

Marybeth Poder was a 2001 and 2009 graduate of the University of Akron before coming to the University of Tennessee. She currently resides in Akron with her husband, two beautiful children, and obnoxious dog. She is planning to pursue a career in the academy in order to continue her research and teaching.