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Working-Class

Politics in the

United States,

1900–1965

COMMON
SENSE
& A LITTLE
FIRE

ANNELISE ORLECK

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AUDACITY:
THE UPRISING
OF WOMEN
GARMENT
WORKERS,
1909-1915

*I read about them now—all
those important people and
Clara Lemlich here, Clara
Lemlich there! What did I
know about trade unionism?
Audacity—that was all I
had—audacity!
—Clara Lemlich in a
1954 interview*

THE EMERGENCE OF "INDUSTRIAL FEMINISM," 1909-1915

Between 1909 and 1915, women garment workers in northeastern and midwestern cities exploded in an unprecedented show of labor militancy. The first eruption came in New York City in November 1909. After an inflammatory speech by twenty-three-year-old Clara Lemlich, described by the press as a "philippic in Yiddish," between 20,000 and 40,000 young shirtwaist makers struck for better wages and working conditions. The press quickly dubbed this famous strike "the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand." To understand the catalytic impact of this uprising—the largest women's strike to that time—we must see it through the eyes of the "girl strikers" and of young women workers across the United States, who cheered their New York counterparts and organized strikes of their own. Clara Lemlich told one journalist that the shirtwaist makers' uprising had given young women factory workers "a new understanding of their relation to each other." It was a moment of crystallization, the sign of a new integrated class and gender consciousness among U.S. working women.¹

Flames from the volcanic 1909 uprising licked industrial cities from New York to Michigan. Within a matter of weeks, 15,000 women waistmakers in Philadelphia walked off their jobs. The spirit of militancy soon touched the Midwest. In 1910, Chicago women led a strike of 41,000 men's clothing makers. The following year, women workers and the wives of male workers played key roles in a bitter cloakmakers' strike in Cleveland. Meanwhile, in Muscatine, Iowa, young women button makers waged and won a long battle for union recognition. In 1912, corset makers in Kalamazoo, Michigan, launched a campaign for better working conditions that polarized their city and won national press attention. In 1913, a strike of underwear and kimono

makers swept up 35,000 young Brooklyn girls and women. Finally, in 1915, Chicago dressmakers capped this period of women's labor militancy by winning recognition of their local union after years of struggle. They elected their organizer, Fannia Cohn, as the first woman vice president of a major American labor union.²

Cohn, Rose Schneiderman, Pauline Newman, and Clara Lemlich were at the center of a storm that by 1919 had brought half of all women garment workers into trade unions. Individually and in tandem, the four women participated in all of the major women's strikes between 1909 and 1915, arguably the most intense period of women's labor militancy in U.S. history. This wave of "uprisings" seemed to herald the birth of a working women's movement on a scale never before seen. And it catapulted the four young women into positions of leadership, forcing them, in conjunction with colleagues, to articulate a clearly defined set of goals for the new movement.³

Still young and uncertain, the four learned as they went. The 1909 shirtwaist strike would provide a quick lesson in the art of managing sustained mass protest. But at strike's end their strategic expertise still outstripped their ability to articulate a coherent political philosophy. In the passion and excitement of the years that followed, Schneiderman, Newman, Lemlich, and Cohn would begin to mature as political leaders and to forge a vision of political change that originated in their years on the shop floor. Pauline Newman would later describe this new brand of activism as politics of the 1909 vintage, fermented during a brief era of young women's mass protest. That description expresses the importance of the 1909 strike as both symbol and catalyst for a new working women's politics.

"Industrial feminism," the phrase coined in 1915 by scholar Mildred Moore to describe working women's militancy over the previous six years, evokes the same spirit but focuses more broadly. It simultaneously captures the interaction between women workers and feminist activists and recognizes the profound influence that the shop floor had on shaping working women's political consciousness. Industrial feminism accurately depicts the contours of an emerging political movement that by decade's end would propel the problems and concerns of industrial working women to the center of U.S. political discourse and make them players in the Socialist Party, the suffrage movement, and the politics of progressive reform.⁴

Industrial feminism was not a carefully delineated code of political thought. It was a vision of change forged in an atmosphere of crisis and awakening, as women workers in one city after another "laid down their scissors, shook the threads off their clothes and calmly left the place that stood between them and starvation." These were the words of former cloakmaker, journalist, and

Socialist Party activist Theresa Malkiel, a partisan chronicler of women's labor militancy. Once an organizer, later a mentor for Newman, Lemlich, and Schneiderman, Malkiel told readers of the *New York Call* that they should not be surprised by the seemingly sudden explosion of young women worker's discontent. As hard as they might find it to take seriously the notion of a "girl's strike," she warned them, this was no outburst of female hysteria. "It was not . . . a woman's fancy that drove them to it," she wrote, "but an eruption of a long smoldering volcano, an overflow of suffering, abuse and exhaustion."⁵

Common sense, Pauline Newman would later say, dictated the most immediate goals of industrial feminists in the era of women's strikes. Given the dire realities of garment workers' lives, the first order of business had to be to improve their wages, hours, and working conditions. Toward that end the "girl strikers" of 1909-15 followed the most basic tenets of unionism. They organized, struck, and negotiated through their labor unions. But the "long-smoldering volcano" that Malkiel cautioned her readers to heed had been stirred to life by more than dissatisfaction over low wages and poor conditions.

The nascent political philosophy that began to take shape after the 1909 strike was more complex than the bread-and-butter unionism of AFL president Samuel Gompers. Why, young working women reasoned, should unions only negotiate hours and wages? They wanted to build unions that would also offer workers educational and cultural activities, health care, and maybe even a chance to leave the city and enjoy the open countryside.

Such ambitious goals derived largely from the personal experiences of industrial feminist leaders like Cohn, Schneiderman, Lemlich, and Newman. Political activism had enriched the four young women's lives, exposing them to more interesting people than they would have met had they stayed on the shop floor: writers, artists, professors, people with ideas. Through politics they had found their voices and a forum in which to raise them. The personal excitement and satisfaction they found in activism in turn shaped the evolution of their political vision: they wanted to create institutions that would provide some of the same satisfactions to any working woman who joined.

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 that 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. But

each core group contributed an important dimension to the political education of the four organizers.

1 With their male counterparts and older women in the labor movement, they shared a class solidarity that would always remain at the heart of their politics. That commitment was strengthened in the 1910s, when three of the four worked for the ILGWU as general organizers. Traveling around the country, they met coal miners, loggers, and railroad workers who shared both their experiences of exploitation as laborers and their exhilaration in the economic and political strength that trade unions gave them.

2 From the middle- and upper-class women who joined them on the picket lines and lent them both financial and strategic support, they learned that trade union activism was not the only way to fight for improved work conditions. These allies would expose Newman, Cohn, Schneiderman, and Lemlich to a world of power and political influence, encouraging them to believe that through suffrage and lobbying, government could be put to work for their benefit.

3 Finally, as they began to think in terms of forging a national movement, they were forced to develop new techniques to reach women workers of different races, religions, and ethnicities. They learned from the women they sought to organize that just as women workers were best reached by women organizers, so Italian, Polish, and Hispanic immigrants and native-born black and white Protestant women were better reached by one of their own than by Jewish women steeped in the political culture of Eastern Europe and the Lower East Side. Though each of the four women had some success in bridging racial and ethnic divisions, they were forced to acknowledge their limitations. They could not do it all themselves; they had to nurture women shop-floor leaders from different backgrounds.

The work required to remain politically effective in this nexus of often-conflicting relationships yielded some real rewards, both strategically and personally. But sometimes the constant struggling wore on them. Conflicts and tensions were brought into sharp relief as the four exhausted themselves making speeches and giving pep talks to weary workers, when they themselves needed reassurance: although they had achieved recognition by the end of the 1909 strike, Schneiderman, Cohn, Newman, and Lemlich were still poor, uneducated, and young. Newman was only eighteen years old when the strike began, and Lemlich twenty-three. Even the elders in the circle, Cohn and Schneiderman, were only twenty-five and twenty-eight, respectively.

Letters between Newman and Schneiderman from that era reveal their vulnerability to slights and criticisms by male union leaders and female reformers. Life on "the battlefield," as Newman referred to it, was lonely. At an

age when other women were contemplating marriage and family, they spent their nights in smoky union halls or the cheap, dingy hotel rooms that unions rented for their organizers. They sometimes questioned their life choices, for the reality of union work was far less glamorous than it had seemed in their shop-floor days. Indeed, Newman would quit several times before decade's end. Ultimately, though, their disillusionment did not drive the four women from the union movement. Instead, it fueled their desire to broaden the vision of U.S. trade unionism. When Schneiderman said "The working woman needs bread, but she needs roses, too," she was speaking from personal experience.⁶

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1909 SHIRTWAIST UPRISING

On November 23, 1909, New York City awoke to a general strike of shirtwaist makers, the largest strike by women workers the United States had ever seen. Overnight, between 20,000 and 40,000 workers—most of them teenage girls—silenced their sewing machines to protest the low wages, long hours, and dangerous working conditions. Though the magnitude of the strike amazed nearly everyone, including Schneiderman, Newman, Cohn, and Lemlich, the four knew that this was no spontaneous uprising: they had been organizing feverishly for almost three years and had noted a transformation in the working women they talked to, a growing sense of collective identity matched by an increasing militancy.

The "shirtwaist uprising" of 1909–10 marked a turning point in American working women's activism. The 1909 strike has been written about frequently enough that there is no need to recount it in detail here. Instead, this narrative explores the impact it had on the consciousness of participants. In the eyes of its leaders—Clara Lemlich, Mollie Schepps, Pauline Newman, and Rosie Perr—the strike was a culmination as well as a beginning.

They had laid the groundwork through a series of smaller strikes and had trained fellow workers to expect and respond to the violent and divisive tactics used by bosses to break the strike. Certainly, in order to sustain the months-long strike, they needed the help of union men, Socialist Party women, the Women's Trade Union League, and upper-class suffragists. Nevertheless, this was a genuine grassroots protest, sparked, defined, and led by working women. Shop-floor leaders, many still in their teens, were responsible both for the size of the strike and for the singular "spirit of the strikers." They had inspired their allies, not the reverse.⁷

Most accounts have focused on the complicated politics of the coalition that supported the strike. The strikers themselves have tended to recede into the background. If we foreground the strikers, the uprising takes on a different

meaning. Seeing these young women as actors, rather than as acted upon, forces a rethinking of the dominant myths of Progressive Era politics. Working women did not simply receive assistance from benevolent reformers and progressive legislators during this period. Through their collective action, they guided the hands and shaped the ideas of those who made public policy.

The young strikers also forced male labor leaders to reassess the role of women in the American labor movement. Most male unionists still clung to the view that women were difficult to organize and were only an ephemeral part of the workforce. But there were certain facts they couldn't ignore. Between 1909 and 1919, half of all women workers in the garment industry would join unions. That was a remarkable percentage for workers in any industry and directly challenged the notion that women workers were unorganizable.⁸

The solidarity and competence of the young women strikers was a direct outgrowth of the shop-to-shop organizing that Lemlich, Schneiderman, Newman, Cohn, and others had been doing since 1906. They had painstakingly cultivated leaders in hundreds of small shops. The result was a base of support so broad that many observers thought the strike seemed leaderless. Writing in the Progressives' weekly magazine, *Survey*, Mary Brown Sumner noted, "These girls—few of them are over twenty years old—are under the domination of no individuals. Into the foreground of this great moving picture comes the figure of one girl after another as her services are needed. . . . Then she withdraws into the background to undertake quietly the danger and humiliation of picket duty or to become a nameless sandwich girl selling papers on the street, no longer the center of interested attention but the butt of the most unspeakable abuse."⁹ Years of preparation had created an infrastructure strong enough to withstand and counteract employers who did everything they could to divide the strikers: stirring up ethnic animosities, attacking the women's virtue, and, when all else failed, unleashing physical violence.

Attempts to divide workers by ethnic group had begun well before the general strike. In September 1909, WTUL secretary Helen Marot reported that manufacturers had tried "to stir up race antagonism between the Jewish and Italian girls. . . . The problem . . . seems to me the most pressing we have before us in helping us deal with women workers in New York City."¹⁰ Clara Lemlich complained that one strike she had been organizing was foiled when management "told the Italian girls that the Jewish girls were striking because they hated Italians and didn't want to work with them. That was not true." Lemlich had to work hard to convince workers in her shop that employers intentionally spread such rumors to keep them from unionizing.¹¹

She must have succeeded, because in September 1909, Lemlich and her co-

workers at the Leiserson factory went out on strike. That same month, Pauline Newman and her co-workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory walked off their jobs. The Triangle management hired prostitutes to infiltrate the picket lines in an attempt to sully the strikers' reputations by association. When the prostitutes offered suggestions about more lucrative work the girls might engage in if they were dissatisfied with their wages, fights broke out and police quickly arrested the picketers.¹²

Many women were beaten either by police or company guards. Clara Lemlich was a frequent target of hired strongmen, both for leading workers out of the shop and for sustaining them on the picket line. "Clara was so badly hurt," one sympathetic article on the strike reported, "that she was laid up for several days. This did not deter her; she went back to her post and, being a logical talker, straightforward and well fitted to gain the confidence of her comrades, she was able to add to the number of strikers." Beatings and mass arrests strengthened the solidarity of the strikers but also worried national ILGWU leaders, who considered calling off the strikes.¹³

But workers were unwilling to squander the momentum they'd gathered. Local 25, Lemlich's union, pushed instead for a general strike in New York's shirtwaist trade, arguing that women workers across the city would rally to support their colleagues at the Triangle and Leiserson shops. Local 25 asked ILGWU secretary John Dyche and AFL president Samuel Gompers to approve the strike. Both resisted the idea, because general strikes were expensive and difficult to orchestrate, and they did not believe that inexperienced teenage girls could sustain one.¹⁴

So, as they had many times over the past few years, the strikers turned for support to the Women's Trade Union League. At the urging of O'Reilly and Schneiderman, both Lemlich and Newman joined the League to drum up support for a general strike. But New York WTUL president Mary Dreier cautioned them to go slowly. The strikers got an unlooked-for boost when Dreier was arrested on their picket line. An embarrassed judge quickly dismissed all charges and apologized for the arrest. Wide press coverage of the incident heightened popular interest in the walkouts and in police brutality against the strikers. In this charged atmosphere, the ILGWU agreed to hold a general meeting at which Gompers and Dreier, among others, would speak. Elated, Schneiderman, O'Reilly, Newman, Lemlich, and others distributed thousands of circulars in Yiddish, English, and Italian, calling workers to the mass meeting at Cooper Union on November 22.¹⁵

That evening, young women workers crowded into the Great Hall of the People in New York's Cooper Union. On the platform were Samuel Gompers, Leonora O'Reilly, and Benjamin Feigenbaum of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. As

Clara Lemlich later recalled, "Each one talked about the terrible conditions of the workers in the shops. But no one gave or made any practical or valid solution." Just as Jacob Panken of the Socialist Party was beginning to speak, the impatient Lemlich shouted out: "I want to say a few words." The *New York Call* described what happened next: "Cries came from all over the hall. 'Get up on the platform.' Willing hands lifted the frail little girl with the flashing black eyes to the stage and she said simply: 'I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike.'" The room was rocked by cheers. Feigenbaum asked the assembled women and men if they would take the ancient Jewish oath: "If I forget thee oh Jerusalem, may my right hand wither, may my tongue forget its speech." That Lemlich's strike speech was delivered in Yiddish, and that most people in the room knew the Jewish oath and could substitute *union* for *Jerusalem*, dramatically illustrates how overwhelmingly Jewish this movement was and how closely linked Jewish imagery and their vision of unionism were.¹⁶

The following morning, fifteen thousand waistmakers went on strike. Clara Lemlich spoke at fifteen union halls that day. Tens of thousands of young women would walk out in the weeks to come. The Socialist press was beside itself with glee. Four days after the general strike began, one reporter wrote:

If you go down to the East Side these cold November days, you may see excited groups of women and girls standing at the streetcorners, gathered in public squares and crowded in the doorways. Go to the halls up and down Clinton and Forsythe streets and you will find similar groups multiplied till the overflow blocks the traffic. . . . And these crowds keep no hours. Early in the morning they are already at the streetcorners; late at night the flickering light of the lamppost reveals their animated faces. What is the reason of it all, you may ask? Why is every available hall in lower Manhattan crowded to its uttermost? A hundred voices answer in chorus: "It's the strike of the forty thousand."¹⁷

The mythology of the waistmakers' uprising, recorded in both contemporary newspaper articles and historical accounts, has Clara Lemlich as "a wisp of a girl, still in her teens," rising up spontaneously to interrupt the cautious speeches of her labor movement elders. That characterization reinforced the stereotype, widely held within the union movement, that Jewish working girls were *fabrente maydlakh* (fiery girls) who lacked the cool heads and foresight needed for rational planning.

In truth, Clara Lemlich was twenty-three years old and had been working and organizing for eight years before that famous evening. Her discipline as an

organizer and ability to channel her outrage into a vision of social change had already won her a reputation among fellow workers and Lower East Side unionists. It is likely that many sitting in the audience at Cooper Union that night knew exactly who was climbing up on the stage and had a pretty good idea of what she was going to say.¹⁸

Pauline Newman was a familiar figure as well. That year the ILGWU had made her its first woman general organizer. Known for her level head and detail-oriented mind, Newman was trusted to run daily shop meetings and to arrange strike rallies. She also dispatched speakers to union and street-corner meetings, to press conferences, and to gatherings of affluent supporters. Clara Lemlich was her star speaker. The two became close friends and planned to spend a few days together in the country once the strike was over. That vacation would be a long time coming.

Day after day, Newman sent Lemlich from hall to hall to encourage the young women who had heeded her strike call. Making speeches until she lost her voice, Lemlich reported only good news, assuring hungry strikers that "if we stick together, and we are going to stick, we will win." While Lemlich urged strikers to hold the line, Newman visited the homes of wealthy women to stir up sympathy and donations for the waistmakers.¹⁹

Despite their effectiveness, the strike was threatened by the escalation of police violence against the young women picketers. Two weeks after the strike call, Schneiderman and Dreier led ten thousand young waistmakers on a march to city hall to demand that Mayor George McClellan rein in the police. He promised an investigation but did little. One month into the strike, there had been 771 arrests, many made with undue force.²⁰

WTUL leaders decided to try a different tack. They called a mass meeting of all the young women who had been attacked by police. The press and wealthy supporters were invited. One after another, adolescent girls rose to the stage to tell their stories. There was an aggressiveness to their tone, a sense that they were entitled to better treatment, and an explicit awareness of their constitutional rights. Some wore banners that proclaimed in Yiddish, "We Are Not Slaves." They spoke bitterly about being beaten but also expressed pride that the ferocity with which they were being physically assaulted was a measure of just how much they threatened employers and police.

Mollie Weingast told a cheering crowd that when an officer tried to arrest her, she informed him that she had a constitutional right to picket. Minnie Margolis demanded that a policeman protect her from physical attack by her boss. When he refused, she took down his badge and precinct numbers. It was, she told the audience, an officer's job to protect her right to protest peacefully. Celie Newman, sixteen, said that police had manhandled her and dragged her

into court, where her boss told a judge that she was an anarchist and should be deported. At another meeting earlier that week, seventeen-year-old Etta Ruth said that police had taunted her with lewd suggestions.²¹

Implying that picketers were little better than streetwalkers, employers often resorted to sexual innuendos to discredit the strikers. "It is a question, whether it is worse to be a streetwalker or a scab," one indignant striker responded tartly. Other women noted that starvation wages drove women into prostitution. The workers clearly resented the manner in which middle-class standards of acceptable feminine behavior were used to manipulate them even though they enjoyed none of the advantages of middle-class birth. Then as now, society offered a limited range of cultural images of working-class women. They were either "good" girls who listened docilely to fathers, employers, and policemen, or "bad" women whose aggressive behavior made them akin to prostitutes. By walking on picket lines and going public with their demands, they'd forfeited their claims to femininity and respectability—and thus to protection.²²

Such women were shown little deference by police and company thugs, who attacked them with iron bars, sticks, and billy clubs. And they received little sympathy in court when they attempted to press charges. One young woman appeared in court with a broken nose, a bruised face, and a head swathed in bandages. Yet the judge dropped her assault charge against police. "You are on strike against God and nature," one magistrate told a worker.²³ Only the League's decision to invite college students and wealthy women onto the picket lines ended the violence. Alva Belmont and Anne Morgan led a contingent of New York's wealthiest women in what newspapers dubbed "mink brigades," which patrolled the dirty sidewalks of the Lower East Side. Fearful of clubbing someone on the Social Register, police grew more restrained.²⁴

The socialites' presence generated both money and press for the strikers. The move proved politically wise for the suffrage cause as well, because the constant proselytizing of suffrage zealot Alva Belmont, who often bailed strikers out of jail, got young workers talking about the vote. But 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.

Encounters in court and with feminist allies speeded the growth of group consciousness. Telling their stories in court, to reporters, and to sympathetic audiences of college and society women, the strikers grew more confident of

their speaking abilities and of their capacity to interpret their world. They became more aware of the distribution of power in the United States. And finally, the violence directed against them intensified their bonds with one another.

For Schneiderman, Newman, and Lemlich, the 1909 shirtwaist uprising sped their maturation as organizers and political leaders. Fannia Cohn was not directly involved, but as she busily labored to organize the sweatshops in the underwear trade, she was energized and inspired by the strike. She would refer to it in her organizing and writing for the rest of her career. The strike breathed new life into a struggling immigrant labor movement and transformed the tiny ILGWU into a union of national significance. Still, it ended with mixed success for workers. Many won pay increases and union recognition; others did not. And the contracts hammered out by ILGWU negotiators left a devastating legacy, for without consulting the strikers, male union negotiators decided that safety conditions were less important than other issues. Their concessions would come back to haunt the entire labor movement two years later, when the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory burned.²⁵

THE INDUSTRIAL FEMINIST ALLIANCE, 1910-1915

The shirtwaist uprising focused national attention on the problems of New York's young women factory workers. But there were hundreds of thousands of women workers in other cities and in other trades who were still not unionized. During the next five years, Rose Schneiderman, Clara Lemlich, and Fannia Cohn continued organizing in New York, while Pauline Newman took to the road as the woman organizer for the ILGWU.

The problem of ethnic, religious, and racial difference surfaced quickly as the four began trying to organize women of varied backgrounds. Partly out of pragmatism, partly in response to the anti-Semitism they encountered from more affluent allies, the four came to espouse a form of cultural pluralism. Given the diversity of the American working class, if they were to be successful at building a unified movement of working women, they would have to sensitize themselves to a range of cultures.

Pauline Newman spent the next four years trying to learn how. The ILGWU gave Newman a tremendous territory to cover. With mechanization, mass immigration, and the emergence of a ready-to-wear clothing market, the garment industry had spread rapidly. By 1910, there were garment manufacturing pockets in every major Eastern seaboard city and in population centers as far west as Iowa. Newman was on the road constantly, crisscrossing New England, Pennsylvania, and the Midwest. The WTUL and the Socialist Party

asked her to speak to a variety of workers while she was on the road; as a result, she visited not only the inner-city slums where most garment shops were located but also gritty, gray steel towns and bleak, freezing coal-mining camps. She worked with native-born Protestant women, Slavic, Irish, Polish, and Italian women, and Eastern European Jews. She had no real home for four years; she lived instead in hotel rooms and boardinghouses from Philadelphia to Boston to Cleveland to Chicago to St. Louis to Kalamazoo.²⁶

It was an incredible education. Newman would later liken it to graduate school. (She had gotten her undergraduate degree, she liked to say, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.) She chronicled her travels in articles for the Socialist press. These published pieces were mostly triumphal polemics lionizing the women workers, whom she called "labor's unknown soldiers." But in letters to friends, Newman confided dramatic mood swings from exhilaration to deep depression. The serious young woman's sensitivity and emotionalism come through on every page. As uncertain about her sexuality as any young adult, she expressed deep confusions about her intense friendships with women and her unsuccessful romances with men. Her emotions were heightened by the loneliness of being on the road for a total of four years, by her battles with male union officials and affluent women allies, and by frustration with women workers who seemed afraid to take any control.

Still, she took pride in one talent that made her particularly useful to the union in its early days of expansion: her chameleonlike ability to appeal to men and women from widely varied class and ethnic backgrounds. Impressed by her fund-raising successes during the 1909 strike, ILGWU officials made Newman their unofficial liaison to women of the upper classes. "She was a great fund-raiser," her grandson Michael Owen says, "which I'm sure is what brought her to everyone's attention. She herself was amazed by it. She was invited into all these rich people's living rooms and would give a talk about what was going on and they would give her a staggering amount of money. She obviously had a gift." Her efforts to appear refined amused some ILGWU colleagues. "She even cultivated this almost British-sounding accent," said Leon Stein, former editor of the union's magazine, *Justice*. "It was great to listen to."²⁷

Shortly after the strike, the union sent her to Boston to speak to wealthy women about the new union label campaign intended to pressure department stores to carry only union-made clothing. Dressed in the immigrant-bohemian style she had come to prefer—white shirt, tie, jacket, and skirt—Newman felt that she looked like the self-taught worker-radical she was. She knew she would stand out in a crowd of Boston Brahmins and was nervous about what she should say to church- and clubwomen. In the hope of bridging the chasms

of class and ethnicity, she exchanged the shtetl and Old Testament imagery that dominated Lower East Side union rhetoric for parables from the New Testament. And she decided to pepper her speeches with allusions to Dickens, Tennyson, and Shelley. (Her shop-floor study groups and classes at the Socialist Literary Society came in handy.) It worked. Many in her Boston audiences pledged to support the union label. Elated when one church group of three hundred women presented her with roses after a speech, Newman wrote to Schneiderman, "Am getting the women of churches now . . . by quoting Christ. I have learned, Rose, learned a lot."²⁸

Of necessity Newman became skilled at adapting her language to each new locale and audience. In Boston, she tried to convince affluent Protestant women to buy only the union label. In Philadelphia, she assisted the immigrant Jewish and Italian waistmakers who, inspired by their New York sisters, were now waging their own bitterly contested strike. As much as her success with the Boston clubwomen exhilarated her, Newman always felt relieved to return to Philadelphia, where she took comfort in the company of the women workers.

Still, union work frustrated her. She felt undercut by the ILGWU's male leaders, who showed little interest in organizing women workers. From the very start of the union, its male officers were caught in a bind. Though they subscribed to a vision of unionism very close to that of the AFL—a muscular fraternity of skilled male workers—their power as a union depended on being able to organize an industry of unskilled women. So they grudgingly encouraged outreach to women workers, but they consistently blocked attempts by female ILGWU members to exert influence over the union's direction.

In the male world of union organizers she felt isolated and beleaguered by crude jokes and teasing. In 1910 she wrote to Schneiderman, "Rose, dear, if I ever had a spark of hope for our Jewish movement [by which she meant the garment unions], I lost it now. . . . They have no manners and no sense. I do not feel at home with them anymore." Some of her colleagues were openly hostile; one accused her of being a publicity seeker for getting her picture in the paper. Needling from her boss, John Dyche, was sometimes affectionate, sometimes not. "Why do you wear a skirt?" he teased her when they crossed paths on her travels. "Getting to be respectable, Paul?"²⁹

She craved the affection and emotional support of her New York friends. In the case of Rose Schneiderman, she seems to have wanted something more. After coming home from a date in October 1910, she wrote, "Wanted you here last night on my birthday. . . . Oh but how I wanted you. All evening I kept on saying if only Rose were here. . . . He said 'it must be Robert instead of Rose.' Rose dear, you will have to come here. . . . I want you too much." It is unclear to

what degree Schneiderman reciprocated those feelings. In later letters, Newman noted feeling "blue from your silence," and signed "yours, forever or never." One letter definitely suggests some tension. "Our relations of the past (and if there is any on your part now) is sacred to me," Newman wrote. "The reason why I don't want to write to you at present is well known to you." Whatever that reason was, it disappeared over time. The two women remained close friends for the rest of their lives.³⁰

Newman's attachment to her women friends nearly broke her when, on March 25, 1911, a raging fire claimed the lives of 146 young workers at the supposedly fireproof Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Newman had worked there for nearly seven years and knew many of the victims. In the days after the fire she sank into a deep depression, wondering aloud why all the years of work and struggle had not prevented it. Schneiderman and Lemlich also lost friends in the fire. Frantic with fear, Lemlich joined the hundreds of New Yorkers who searched among the charred bodies for relatives. A newspaper reporter described her as convulsed by tears and hysterical laughter when she finished her gruesome task without finding a cousin who she feared was among the dead.³¹

The Triangle fire was both a personal loss and a bitter reminder of the urgency of their cause. It heightened their distrust of upper-class allies who preached sisterhood while counseling patience and moderation. Schneiderman wrote that she was "tired of resolutions being passed but never acted upon." At a memorial held by heiress Anne Morgan in Carnegie Hall to raise funds for families of the victims, Schneiderman issued a famous challenge to sympathetic members of the upper class: "This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city. Every week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. . . . There are so many of us for one job it matters little if 146 of us are burned to death. . . . I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from experience it is up to the working people to save themselves."³²

Newman read Schneiderman's speech in Philadelphia and wrote to her, "You really gave them hell, [and I] am glad of it. . . . I wonder how Miss Morgan felt after you got through." But Newman was not able to channel her grief into action. She told Schneiderman that the fire had drained her of hope and energy and that she had submitted her resignation to the union. "I could not write, I could not do anything for the last two or three weeks," she admitted. "The Triangle tragedy had a terrible effect on me."³³

Schneiderman urged Newman to stay on the job. In the wake of such a tragedy, she wrote, they had to redouble their efforts. ILGWU secretary John Dyche, with whom Newman battled incessantly, felt the same way. He refused to accept her resignation. Newman relented, but not with any real joy. She

wrote Schneiderman with deep ambivalence and a touch of envy: "Remember Rose that no matter how much you are with the Jewish people, you are still more with the people of the League and that is a relief. Many times I wish that I could shake the Jewish movement for at least a few years. But, ah that *but* . . . I cannot leave them as long as they don't want to accept my resignation."³⁴

Newman's bond with the immigrant Jewish Socialists, garment unionists, and self-taught intellectuals who made up the leadership of the ILGWU was powerful, scored as it was by conflict and pain. From early adolescence, Jewish Socialism had been a central part of her identity. She could not simply discard it. For this young woman with little formal education and few family ties, the union had become both an intellectual home and a family. Besides, she knew that choosing the all-female world of the Women's Trade Union League would not make her feel less conflicted. Schneiderman had her own struggle trying to find a comfortable place among the elite Christian women of the League.³⁵

The feeling of perennially walking a tightrope drained both women's energy and frayed their nerves. Though expressed in the romantic language of early-twentieth-century women's friendship, their craving for intimacy and understanding grew out of the hard realities of radical immigrant women's lives. Their choice to devote themselves to political activism had left them few safe spaces emotionally. As young single women, their friendships with men in the labor movement were complicated by a need to appear respectable and a sense that men didn't respect them or their work. As immigrant working-class Jews, they found that opening themselves up to middle-class women was equally fraught with danger.

New York WTUL secretary Helen Marot was a Socialist and someone Newman and Schneiderman considered a friend—until she stunned them both by announcing in early 1911 that "the time has come when the League must spend the greater part of its budget for organization among American girls." (By "American," Marot and others meant native-born Protestants.) Marot acknowledged that Russian Jewish women had provided the impetus for the dramatic upsurge in women's labor activism. Still, she said, Jews were too ideological, and their "difference in attitude and understanding was a heavy strain on the generosity of the American girls." Marot claimed to admire the courage of Jewish women but argued that trade unionism would never gain a foothold among American-born women unless the organizers were "American men and women who understood their prejudices."³⁶

Schneiderman and Newman knew well the heavy-handedness of some Jewish male union officials. But they did not attribute the men's arrogance to their ethnic origins, nor did they think it fair for Marot to punish Jewish women workers for the sins of their brothers. Marot's next statement on the

subject to the executive board of the New York WTUL left little doubt in their minds that prejudice, not concern for "American-born women," was at the root of her decision. "We have realized for several years," she said, "that the Russian Jew had little sense of administration and we have been used to ascribing their failures to their depending solely on their emotions and not on constructive work."³⁷

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.³⁸

Clara Lemlich, who would soon have her own problems with middle- and upper-class supporters, somehow managed to stay out of this fight. Life had gotten a bit tricky for Lemlich. Blacklisted by the Shirt and Dress Manufacturer's Association for her role in the 1909 uprising, she'd been forced to use false names to get factory work. But she used her own name when addressing nightly union meetings; in the years after the 1909 strike, the name Clara Lemlich could draw a crowd. Lemlich's Yiddish fire-and-brimstone style riveted women workers. Even Helen Marot was impressed. "The girls were listless and uninterested" until Clara got up to speak, Marot wrote. "[But] they listened intently to Miss Lemlich's speech and were eager for our cooperation."³⁹

Recognizing the need for more women organizers, Pauline Newman began to pull herself out the depression that followed the Triangle fire. A little bit of recognition from ILGWU secretary John Dyche helped enormously. In June of 1911, when six thousand Cleveland cloakmakers struck, Dyche wrote Newman and, citing her past successes in organizing women, asked her to consider representing the union there. Pleased that ILGWU higher-ups seemed finally to be acknowledging her work, Newman agreed. "They are beginning to realize that women can do more effective work than men," she wrote Schneiderman from Cleveland, "especially where girls are concerned."⁴⁰

The Cleveland strike forced Newman to use all her skill at reaching out to women of different backgrounds. Since the strikers were Jewish and Italian women, cloak manufacturers attempted to break the strike by farming out garment work to native-born women in Cleveland's outlying areas. Newman

was assigned the task of persuading these women to support the strike. Her success convinced her that ethnic divisions were not an insurmountable obstacle in unionizing working-class women.⁴¹

In Cleveland, Newman tried her hand at community organizing for the first time since leading the 1907 Lower East Side rent strike. Her success affirmed her belief that workingmen's wives and mothers could make an important contribution to the class struggle. In October 1911, Newman told the story in the WTUL magazine, *Life and Labor*. Workers' wives and mothers, she wrote, went door to door building support for the strike. They ignored the threats of private police hired by manufacturers to patrol the neighborhood. According to Newman's account, guards shot one woman who disobeyed their orders not to enter a strikebreaker's home. When another woman rushed to her aid, guards threatened to shoot her too. "You can shoot me if you want," the woman said, "but I must pick up this woman!" While she was dragging her friend's body away, they shot her too. Newman did not reveal her emotions on having seen blood spilled up close. But the twenty-year-old must have been shaken. In a paean to the bravery of the strikers' wives she wrote, "Never shall I forget the heroism of the women."⁴²

By lauding such women's exploits in her articles, she hoped to move sympathetic readers to action and to forge links between progressive groups: Socialists, the women of the various WTUL branches, union men and women. Weary of union work, she began to feel that she might contribute as much to the class struggle as a writer. The final straw came when John Dyche sent a male organizer to join Newman in Cleveland and paid him a higher weekly wage. Newman decided the time had come to quit the ILGWU for a career as writer and freelance organizer. "You, Rose, know that the seven dollars does not bother me but there is a principle involved and for that I am ready to fight," she wrote Schneiderman. "It was an insult and it hurts an awful lot." Besides, Newman calculated, the union owed her a thousand dollars in back pay, approximately three times the annual salary of an average New York shop girl. Writing could hardly be less lucrative.⁴³

Needing some comfort and familiarity after two years on the road, Newman moved in with her sisters Fanny and Sarah in Chicago and contributed to the upkeep of their children. During the next few months she worked furiously on her writing, contributing articles to the *New York Call*, the *Ladies' Garment Worker*, *Progressive Woman*, *Life and Labor*, the *Chicago Daily Socialist*, and the *International Review*. Josephine Conger Kaneko, editor of the Socialist Party magazine *Progressive Woman*, worked with Newman on her writing and encouraged her literary aspirations. Interestingly, for some of her pieces Newman adopted a pseudonym: Norma Mizer Paul, which used her initials in reverse.

Perhaps this was to deflect criticism from several of her male union colleagues, who felt that she liked publicity a little too much. Newman supplemented her income doing odd jobs for the WTUL and the Socialist Party.⁴⁴

Despite insisting to Schneiderman that she wanted to "give my lungs and mouth a chance to rest," she accepted a winter 1912 assignment from the Socialist Party to do a speaking tour of the Illinois coal belt. Through the coldest months she toured ice-bound mining towns, exhorting impoverished families "to awaken and find the solution to their problem in Socialism." Horrified by the conditions she saw, she realized that some in the rural working class endured worse conditions than did urban factory laborers. "Those who keep the world warm are freezing," she wrote to Schneiderman. "Think of it! Those who supply coal for all the people have no coal to warm their two or three little rooms."⁴⁵

Satisfied by her work, Newman was fairly content to remain based in Chicago. But Schneiderman urged Newman to return to a place where she had a support network and colleagues who appreciated her. Newman was more than open to the suggestion. "The loneliness kills me," she wrote Schneiderman. "I am tired, I want to do something else, and the thought that I may never be able to accomplish it is enough to make me feel miserable for the rest of my life!" But she bristled at Schneiderman's suggestion that she help the ILGWU organize New York's white goods workers. Newman replied tartly, "The International does not give a hang whether a local lives or dies. Much less would they care to employ me. . . . I am glad of not having to depend upon them for my living. Will at all times be in a position to find work without that ignorant and inefficient bunch."⁴⁶

When Schneiderman expressed concern over Newman's feud with Dyche, Newman explained that it was not simply over tactics and equal pay but also over sexual harassment. "I had . . . many times to struggle against him and be annoyed by his love, so-called; you don't know how many times I felt like exposing him." But she had no faith that the male union hierarchy would take her complaint seriously. "I do not even think that I will go up before the General Executive Board," she wrote. "I can't expect any justice of the ignorant, stupid and conservative fools."⁴⁷

Her disillusionment with radical men was sharpened by a brief romance that year with Socialist Party organizer Frank Bohm in Chicago. Bohm provided virtually the only intimacy she had had during her lonely years on the road, and Newman was somewhat smitten. Older and more worldly, Bohm recommended books and promised to try to get her a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin. During the autumn of 1911, she went as far as going to a hotel room with Bohm, but at the last minute decided against having sex.

Later, she was not sure she'd made the right decision. "I, like so many, will live with memories that blur and burn."⁴⁸

Ultimately she was glad she'd cut off the relationship. Bohm's "etitude [*sic*] toward women," Newman wrote Schneiderman, "is not worse or better than the average etitude of a Socialist man toward a woman. I . . . am told lately that he believes in promiscuity and I am inclined to believe that he does. . . . While I am free in everything, I am puritanical in sex and home questions and it just sickens me to think of anyone who is not a strict monogamist." Whether Newman recoiled from Bohm because of her sexual "puritanism," her annoyance with the lack of respect she felt from Socialist men, or because she wasn't attracted to him is unclear. But she apparently had no other romances with men. As time passed, she recognized that her deepest affinities were with women. In February 1912, she wrote Schneiderman, "I feel that there is not a person today whom I love more than I do you. . . . I really don't know whether I could love to a greater extent than I—but you know it, enough said."⁴⁹

By that time, Schneiderman had reached a crisis point in her battle with League leaders over how much time she was devoting to Jewish women workers. In early 1912 Schneiderman tendered her resignation. Newman applauded the decision: "So you have decided to give up the League! Really at such moments one feels like saying, 'What is the use of working sincerely for an organization, giving them the best that is in you, when it is not even appreciated.'"⁵⁰

Over the next few years, Schneiderman and Newman would resign repeatedly. Newman bounced between jobs with the union, the WTUL, and the Socialist Party. Schneiderman traded places with her for a time, leaving the WTUL to organize for the ILGWU. But she, like Newman, tired of union leaders' seeming indifference to attempts at organizing women. And she resented not being given credit for her work. When the union sent a male organizer to lead a strike she had labored to build, she resigned and returned to the WTUL.

Both felt on most solid ground with other working-class women who shared their vision. But they did not always get along with them, either. Newman was not above backbiting. Of Chicago WTUL organizer Bessie Abramowitz, an Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) organizer who later married powerful labor leader Sidney Hillman, she wrote, "Her own people of the trade laugh at her." And with a decided lack of prescience, she called another Chicago WTUL organizer, Mary Anderson, future director of the U.S. Women's Bureau, "of very little use to the labor movement." These women would continue to work with Newman for nearly fifty years. But it is perhaps here that we find the root of long-standing tensions between the Chicago and New York branches of the WTUL.⁵¹

Newman had no intention of returning to the ILGWU, but when a large strike at the Kalamazoo Corset Company ran into trouble, Dyche asked Newman if she would consider traveling to Michigan for the union. "I tell you Rose," Newman gloated, "It feels fine when you can say to a secretary of the International to 'go to hell with your job' and after have the same man beg you to work for them again!" She had her work cut out for her. As she stepped off the train in Kalamazoo, Newman was handed a court injunction against the strike. To the joy of the strikers who had come to meet the new organizer, she tore it up in a typical act of bravado. However, when the union called the other organizers away, stranding Newman in the most all-American town she'd yet seen, she felt more than a little lost.⁵²

This was a new situation for her. She was comfortable running strikes that pitted immigrant workers against immigrant owners. But this was, in her words, "an entirely American element." On top of that, the strike was proving hard to control. Management refused to negotiate. Scores of women were being arrested daily. And organizers had left her to manage, as the strike's central issue, a matter that made her profoundly uncomfortable: sexual harassment in the shop.⁵³

Seeking to stir up public outrage, strike organizer Josephine Casey had laid out the strike's goals in a letter to the *Detroit Times*: "We are fighting to purify the factory, to bring about the dismissal of the foreman and those male employees who have been continually insulting the girl employees and who have been dragging not a few of them down to ruin. The time has passed when an employer can expect to hold girl employees who are subjected to indignities." Calling for the dismissal of a foreman for sexual harassment, or for any other reason, was a nervy thing to do; few strikers to that time had made such demands.⁵⁴

Sexual harassment of female factory workers was commonplace. References to sexual harassment of working women abound in the literature of progressive scholars, and it was acknowledged as a problem by both social reformers and women labor leaders. However, even reform-minded observers argued that it was up to the worker to find her own solution. A 1913 advice book entitled *Vocations for Girls* suggested unrealistically that young women receiving unwanted physical attention or suffering from "unsanitary surroundings, deadening work and low companionship . . . should promptly seek other employment."⁵⁵

An aggravating factor for working women was that some male workers and employers felt that female factory workers were fair prey. One woman cigar maker told a state investigator, "Many men who would not, under any circumstances, offer the slightest insult or disrespectful remark or glance to a female

in the streets[] . . . in the shops, will whoop and give . . . cat calls and a peculiar noise made with their lips which is supposed to be an endearing salutation."⁵⁶

In an age when sexual matters were rarely discussed in public, neither labor leaders nor reformers expected unions to tackle the issue. So Josephine Casey's assertion that ending sexual harassment was a legitimate union demand sparked widespread controversy. Leonora O'Reilly supported Casey's strategy. She said the corset company so underpaid its women workers that "the wages of sin it offers to the young girls who will 'pay the price' are alluring." But Newman, in spite of her own experience with John Dyche (or, perhaps, because of it), was upset that the strike had come to rest on this issue.⁵⁷

She warned ILGWU superiors that "attacking the company" was the wrong strategy because it would anger the owners and make them unwilling to negotiate. And in a letter to Schneiderman, she virtually dismissed the issue's importance: "Rose dear, you know as well as I that there is not a factory today where the same immoral condition does not exist! You remember . . . factories where you have worked and so do I and both of us know that [in] the cloak factories and all other shops in the city of New York or Chicago, every one of the men will talk to the girls, take advantage of them if the girls will let them. The foremen and the superintendent will flirt with the girls. . . . It is nothing new for those who know it exists everywhere." Her proposed solution reflects a willful refusal to acknowledge the unequal power relations that made sexual harassment so prevalent on the shop floor: Newman concluded tersely that the problem could be handled "by educating the girls."⁵⁸

The issue clearly made her uncomfortable. Newman was twenty-one years old, unmarried, and the only woman then employed by any U.S. union as a general organizer. Her job entailed wandering from city to city, living out of hotels filled with sometimes predatory men, and attending late-night meetings in rough neighborhoods. Any hint of sexual vulnerability would have destroyed her viability as a union representative, making it impossible for her to work with male organizers or with young women still living in their parents' houses. Only by cultivating an image of toughness and invulnerability could she maintain her position within the union, not to mention her own emotional stability.

Newman felt she needed to project a powerful image of women workers generally. In writings and speeches, Newman liked to lionize women strikers, to laud them for their bravery and stamina. To politicize the issue of sexual harassment meant acknowledging that bringing women into the union movement introduced muddy issues like sexuality onto the morally clear battleground of class struggle. That may have contributed to her decision not to

report John Dyche's harassment of her. And that was perhaps why she suggested that unions simply teach women workers to defend themselves, for she must have known that was not a realistic solution for a woman factory worker facing a male employer.

Ultimately, as Newman had feared, the strike was broken by management's refusal to negotiate. It seems conceivable that part of the blame lay with Newman, who balked at pushing the women's demands. But she insisted that the ILGWU leadership was at fault because they were ill-equipped to deal with native-born manufacturers. As a last resort, Newman organized a boycott of the corset company. Her success restored her confidence in her organizing skills, but it didn't do the women workers much good. Their employer went out of business.⁵⁹

Chagrined and homesick, Newman was ready to return to New York. Her decision was sealed in the spring of 1912, when she received a pained letter from Schneiderman, whose companion Rose Rishon had just moved out of the house they had shared with Schneiderman's mother and sister. "Poor Rose!" Newman comforted, "I am sorry. For if there is anyone who can feel with you it is me. . . . I often think that a person of my temperament should not be destined to roam about alone. . . . Being absent from those you love is hell—at least to me!"⁶⁰

Newman returned to New York early in 1913, broke and out of work but relieved to be home. Schneiderman helped her get an inspector's position on the Joint Board of Sanitary Control, a factory inspection commission established in the settlement of the 1909 strike. The ILGWU also paid Newman to write the "Woman's Sphere" column for its magazine, the *Ladies' Garment Worker*. The battle-weary, twenty-two-year-old columnist cast herself as a seasoned adviser to innocent young women. She warned them sternly to stay away both from "Prince Charmings" and cheap romance novels, to save themselves for mature love and real literature. The didactic tone of her columns reflected the gap that had opened up between her and the average shop-floor worker.⁶¹

If Newman had hoped to stay out of the fray for a while, that desire faded quickly once Schneiderman enlisted her in the League's long-fought campaign to organize a general strike of white goods and kimono makers. Newman initiated an investigation by the Joint Board of Sanitary Control and found the conditions bleak. Many of the shops were set up in dark basement rooms—poorly ventilated, unsanitary firetraps. The trade seemed ripe for union organizing.

But there were myriad obstacles. The shops were small and scattered. A large number of the workers were girls under the age of sixteen, most of them

new immigrants, who lacked both confidence and a command of the English language. The trade employed girls of so many different nationalities that the workers could hardly speak to one another. Fannia Cohn had led a general strike of kimono workers in Brooklyn during the summer of 1910. But the strike had not had the support of the ILGWU and had thus been a failure. By 1913, Cohn, Schneiderman, Newman, and several other organizers were pleading with the ILGWU leadership to help them organize a citywide white goods strike.⁶²

But the ILGWU's executive board had begun to focus on crushing, not fanning, grass-roots militancy. The objects of their attention were the women of Local 25, Clara Lemlich's union. Disgusted by the bureaucratization that had occurred since the 1909 uprising, these women had just unseated their local officers and replaced them with a more responsive and sexually integrated group. Flush with their new power, they began agitating for another general strike to revive the spirit of labor militancy in the shirtwaist and dress trades.⁶³

ILGWU president Abraham Rosenberg was not pleased. When the ILGWU needed militant rank-and-file members to spur organization, he and others in the union leadership were willing to tolerate fiery women organizers like Lemlich. But once a trade was organized they had no more use for shop-floor militancy, which they felt got in the way of the union's capacity to negotiate with employers. That was true enough. Union officials' leverage with employers depended on their ability to control their rank and file.

But militancy, once stirred, was not always easy to contain. On January 5, 1913, thousands of women waistmakers and male tailors literally smashed down the doors of the New York Hippodrome after being told by the ILGWU leadership that they could not vote on whether a general strike would be called in their trades. Inside the Hippodrome, a select group of rank and file were about to vote. To prevent a riot, the crowd was allowed to enter the meeting hall. After a loud and clamorous meeting, the decision to strike was made at a peak of emotional intensity. But the ensuing strike was anticlimactic.⁶⁴

Rather than allowing the strikers to set their own demands, ILGWU president Rosenberg and secretary John Dyche secretly negotiated a deal with several large employers that undercut both the shop-floor militants and small manufacturers. Management agreed to allow a short strike to placate the workers and crush small competitors; the union agreed to end the strike quickly if employers signed a protocol in the dress trade guaranteeing minimum wage standards. As the two sides had arranged, the strike was called off after only three days.⁶⁵

When the settlement was announced to one group of Italian strikers at

Cooper Union, four thousand women rioted. Outraged that a deal had been struck in advance of the strike and without the knowledge of the rank and file, they called the protocol a "frame-up" and protested by sitting down on Third Avenue and stopping traffic. In another meeting on nearby St. Mark's Place, the settlement was met with jeers and stomping of feet. Though a majority would ultimately agree to support the protocol, it was only a bare majority, and a sullen one at that. Nearly half the women strikers delivered a no-confidence vote to ILGWU leaders. The leaders, women shop-floor militants said angrily, preferred to deal with employers rather than with their own members.⁶⁶

That elitism would become characteristic of the ILGWU leadership. The male officers, sitting atop a largely female rank and file, perceived themselves to have little in common with the workers they were supposed to represent. They ignored the loud cries of protest against the protocol, asserting that there was no real discontent among the workers, only a plot by the rival Industrial Workers of the World to destroy the union. (The IWW was an anarcho-syndicalist industrial union with great appeal among Italian workers.) They would make similar charges over the next half century, writing off every shop-floor movement for democratization of the union as a power play by the Communist Party.⁶⁷

The women militants were angry not only because their drive to democratize the union had been crushed but because the protocol was a mixed blessing. It facilitated organizing (Local 25 shot up to twenty-three thousand members after it was signed), guaranteed a minimum wage for every job in the trade, and gave the Joint Board of Sanitary Control greater power to ensure safe, healthy working conditions in the shops. But it also institutionalized a sex-based division of labor in which only men could be hired to fill the highest-paid positions and only women could be placed in the lowest-paid jobs. Further, the protocol guaranteed men higher wages than women even in jobs open to both. Union recognition and a guaranteed minimum wage unquestionably improved the day-to-day conditions under which most shirtwaist and dressmakers labored. But it drastically limited the power of the average worker.⁶⁸

While they were crushing militancy among the already-organized shirtwaist makers and dressmakers, the leaders tolerated it among the still-unorganized white goods workers, recognizing reluctantly that there was no other way to bring them into the union. After long years of union indifference in the face of painstaking shop-floor organizing, particularly by Rose Schneiderman and Fannia Cohn, the young white goods workers were ready to rise.⁶⁹

The ensuing strike was in many ways reminiscent of the 1909 uprising. Once again, a group of supposedly "unorganizable" young women workers sur-

prised everyone—that is, everyone except the women who'd organized them—by launching a mass strike involving almost thirty thousand workers. As in 1909, the young strikers captured the attention and support of middle- and upper-class women reformers in New York. Here again, the galvanizing issue was police violence. Rose Schneiderman, chief organizer of the strike, asked New York's mayor, "Red Mike" Hylan, to deputize fifty women trade unionists to arrest strongmen hired by employers to break into meetings and attack the strikers. Hylan refused, claiming that it would be scandalous for New York City to deputize women.⁷⁰

As they had four years earlier, some of New York City's most affluent women stemmed the violence. A group of Barnard College women announced that they would walk picket lines daily to monitor physical abuse of strikers by police and hired guards. Progressive feminist Fola La Follette, daughter of Senator Robert La Follette, mobilized a group of suffragists to accompany strikers to jail. During one night in jail La Follette collected enough evidence to convince her father to sponsor a congressional resolution calling for an investigation of conditions in the garment trades.⁷¹

The bulk of the young strikers lived at the poverty level and had little money to pool for strike funds, so many went hungry during the strike. Rose Pastor Stokes, the former cigar maker who married millionaire J. G. Phelps Stokes and converted him to Socialism, opened five lunchrooms around the city where strikers could eat free of charge. And in a gesture that reminded the city how young these labor militants were, society sisters L. C. and Joanna Hartshorn hosted huge chocolate cake parties for thousands of white goods workers. The girl strikers, many of whom were not yet fifteen, were thrilled at a chance to put on their best dresses and attend a party.⁷²

Also reminiscent of the 1909 strike, elite feminists flocked to the picket lines to convince strikers of the importance of the vote. The Women's Political Union, a suffragist group, sponsored regular entertainment for white goods workers; held at Cooper Union, these events infused classical music with a women's rights message. On one occasion Madame Carrigues, a Colorado suffragist and philanthropist and founder of the Carrigues Grand Opera Trio, taught her young audience to sing "the women's Marseillaise."⁷³

New York progressives sought to use the strike to dramatize the need for industrial reform. The National Consumer League's Frances Perkins published a letter in the *New York Times* urging union leaders and employers to remember the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire when negotiating the strikers' safety demands. The unquestioned publicity high point for progressives came when former president Theodore Roosevelt decided to visit the strikers. The *New York Times* reported the aging warrior's act of benevolence with obvious

relish. Facing a room full of teenage girls, TR raised his hand for silence. "Now young ladies," he intoned, "I want to know all about your lives; how you work and how you manage to be cheerful. Just gather around me and tell your stories!" Roosevelt's words were translated into Spanish, Italian, Turkish, and Greek, reflecting the variety of nationalities employed in the trade.⁷⁴

As Roosevelt sat on a desk and swung his feet, the girls pressed around him and told their personal stories: a sixteen-year-old Spaniard talked about working thirteen-hour days; a seventeen-year-old Italian told him about the exorbitant sums girls were required to pay for their own sewing machines; and a fifteen-year-old Jewish girl said she made only \$3.50 a week because she was penalized for not working on the Sabbath. "This is crushing the future motherhood of the country," Roosevelt concluded. "It must be stopped. It is too horrible for words." When one teenager ended her story with a plea that the girls be allowed to sing at work, Roosevelt muttered under his breath: "The brutes, to prevent them from singing if they can be cheerful under such conditions." His visit greatly increased sympathetic publicity of the strike.⁷⁵

Such publicity portrayed the strikers as children in need of protection and moved New York progressives to work harder for the passage of labor laws that would protect them. But like their older sisters in the shirtwaist trade, the teenage white goods workers saw the strike a bit differently. They had begun to feel capable of protecting themselves. Newman described the strike as these young women's first lesson in "the school of solidarity." "With what enthusiasm they took up the first lessons of the class struggle! Picketing, getting arrested, remaining nights in jail, arguing with their employers, defying the police, and getting back at the hired thugs; presiding at shop meetings, calling the roll, and learning to rely upon themselves. Young and inexperienced as these girls are, their strength of character is simply remarkable. They have learned in the past five weeks to do their own thinking . . . and to use it for themselves and their class."⁷⁶

In the illustrated pages of the *Ladies' Garment Worker*, Newman introduced readers to young women like seventeen-year-old Minnie Labetsky, whose employer offered to bring her mother to America if she would cross the picket line. "I would rather die than go back to work, to scab," Minnie reportedly vowed. (A smiling photo of Minnie accompanies her story.) Then there was Newman's personal favorite, Lillie Lavy, "pet of the strikers," a poet who struck a decidedly bohemian pose for her photo. Lavy wrote picket-line poetry that decried the gap between rich and poor. "Who knows but that girls like Lillie, if given a chance, would surprise the world by showing themselves capable of serving society better by writing or painting than by making corset covers," Newman wrote.⁷⁷

Demonstrating their newfound confidence, these workers rejected the instructions of union leaders and turned down a partial settlement offer. Instead, as one witness reported, "girls of sixteen and seventeen developed remarkable powers of oratory as they sprang to the platform to urge their sisters to stand out for full union recognition." Two-thirds voted against accepting any settlement that stopped short of that. Then they returned to the picket lines to continue the fight.

Six weeks into the strike, a protocol agreement modeled on that of the shirtwaist and dress trade was signed. Again the workers greeted the victory as a mixed success. Fannia Cohn's union, Local 41, joined the rebellious waist-makers in Local 25 as the strongest voices for women's militancy in the ILGWU. These two locals, forged under extreme circumstances on the picket line and in the face of serious police brutality, became the first unions in the country to create joint grievance and wage scale boards on which women workers negotiated with management. Cohn represented her local on the boards. This new women's leadership promised to work to get more women into executive positions in the union. Fannia Cohn would be the first woman to achieve that rank.⁷⁸

In 1915, Cohn was hired by the ILGWU to try to unionize Chicago's dress-makers. She led a successful strike and, in August 1915, won a charter for the city's first dressmakers' union. This feat, which Rose Schneiderman had failed to accomplish, moved a Chicago reporter to call Cohn "one of labor's shrewdest diplomats." The Chicago Dressmakers' Union voted to send their organizer to the 1916 ILGWU convention. There, at age thirty-one, Fannia M. Cohn became the first woman vice president of a U.S. union. Her election was the outgrowth of a movement by shop-floor militants to elect the first woman to the union's General Executive Board.⁷⁹

Perhaps sensing that there might be resentment about the fact that the first woman to hold such high office in the U.S. labor movement was a daughter of the middle class, Cohn would later insist that she was drafted. She described a scene of jubilation after her election in which women delegates danced around her holding hands and singing revolutionary songs. "The only silent and confused observer was I," she wrote, "because I . . . realized the responsibility that was mine. I . . . then solemnly resolved that never, never would these women and men resent the confidence they placed in me." But Mary Goff, who knew Cohn from the white goods strike, recalled her colleague as neither passive nor confused at the 1916 convention. Goff believed that Cohn wanted the vice presidency badly and says she campaigned hard for it. These conflicting reminiscences illuminate the complicated relationship that existed even then between Cohn and the union to which she would devote her life.⁸⁰

After almost a decade of intensive strike work, Cohn, Schneiderman, Newman, and Lemlich began to turn their energies from street-level organizing to institution building. But memories of those years of mass strikes stayed with these organizers as they and their movement matured. In later years, bitter infighting would tear apart both the labor and women's movements within the United States, pitting former industrial feminist allies against one another. But even as they parted over strategy, women of the 1909 vintage would remain bound together by that shared vision forged in the turbulent years after 1909. For the four women, political organizing would always be—as Rose Schneiderman put it in 1912—a struggle for both bread and roses. During the second half of the 1910s they would see the realization of one important step toward that goal, as working-class women joined the struggle to win the vote for American women.



Above: The Newman family in Lithuania, ca. 1900. Nine-year-old Pauline Newman is in front, holding a book. (Courtesy of Elisabeth Burger)

Left: Clara Lemlich in her midteens, relaxing with a book in the Ukraine, ca. 1902-3 (Courtesy of Evelyn Velson)

Fannia Cohn, the young revolutionary, in Minsk, ca. 1903-4 (Fannia Cohn Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library)



Rose Schneiderman in New York. This picture was taken during the capmaker's general strike of 1905. (Rose Schneiderman Collection, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University)



The New York Herald ran this photograph in recognition of the "girl leaders" of the 1907 Lower East Side rent strike. Pauline Newman, age sixteen, is on the far right. (Courtesy of Elisabeth Burger)



This drawing ran in the New York Evening Journal during the autumn of 1909, on the eve of the shirtwaist makers' "uprising." Clara Lemlich is in the front row, the first woman from the right who is wearing a hat. (Tamiment Institute Library, New York University)



During the 1909 shirtwaist makers' strike—the largest strike of women in the United States to that time—hundreds of young women garment workers hit the streets to sell copies of a special edition of the New York Call, the city's Socialist newspaper. The Socialist Party had donated the paper free of charge to the strikers to help them raise money for the strike fund. (International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Archives, Cornell University)

Clara Lemlich, shirtwaist maker, spark of the 1909 uprising (Courtesy of Martha Schaffer)



Meeting at the New York Women's Trade Union League during the 1909 strike.

Standing: second from left, Helen Marot; fifth from left, Rose Schneiderman. Seated: second from right, Leonora O'Reilly, on the telephone (Tamiment Institute Library, New York University)




On March 25, 1911, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, 146 young workers died in one of the worst industrial fires ever. Clara Lemlich, a former Triangle employee, was one of hundreds of New Yorkers who searched among the bodies of the victims to see if any of the dead were relatives or friends. (Tamiment Institute Library, New York University)




Above: Rose Schneiderman was the most popular speaker employed by Harriot Stanton Blatch's wage earners' suffrage organization, the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women. Here, Blatch is introducing Schneiderman at a rally. (Rose Schneiderman Collection, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University)

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UNDER THE AUSPICES OF **AMERICAN SUFFRAGETTES**
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Left: Handbill announcing a speech by Rose Schneiderman for the American Suffragettes, 1914 (Rose Schneiderman Collection, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University)



Pauline Newman entertains the strikers, 1912, Kalamazoo, Michigan. (International Ladies' Garment Workers' Archives, Cornell University)

Halloween Party, New York Women's Trade Union League, 1913. Rose Schneiderman is the woman standing on the right; Pauline Newman, in mustache, is the woman seated on the left. (Courtesy of Elisabeth Burger)



3

COMMON SENSE:
NEW YORK
CITY WORKING
WOMEN AND
THE STRUGGLE
FOR WOMAN
SUFFRAGE

Surely . . . women won't lose any more of their beauty and charm by putting a ballot in a ballot box once a year than they are likely to lose standing in foundries or laundries all year round.

—Rose Schneiderman

Man as a class has ruled women. He wants to make her think that it is good for her that he rules her, but it is too late. We are here, Senators. We are 800,000 strong in New York State alone.

—Clara Lemlich

FROM THE PICKET LINE TO THE BALLOT BOX

For the vast majority of the young women who participated in the strikes of 1909–15, political activism was a passing involvement, inflamed by the passion of youth and soon discarded in favor of career or family responsibilities. For some, like waistmaker Fannie Zinsher, who was portrayed in the press along with Lemlich and Newman as a leader of the 1909 strike, involvement in trade unionism would be remembered as a youthful indiscretion. “I was very young at the time,” Zinsher wrote many years later, “and it was my first and last experience in the industrial field. All I remember is that it was a very trying experience and now it seems like a nightmare of long ago.”¹

But for other young women organizers, like Clara Lemlich, Fannia Cohn, Rose Schneiderman, and Pauline Newman, those militant years were revelatory. The excitement of picket lines, street-corner meetings, and strategic debates was addictive. Despite the attendant difficulties and frustrations, activism became a way of life. But as the years wore on, the four began to look beyond the immediacy of strikes and protests, toward longer-term and larger-scale changes. In the aftermath of the Triangle fire, few things seemed more pressing than enacting laws to ameliorate the gravest hazards of industrial labor.

Toward that end, Schneiderman, Newman, Lemlich, and Cohn joined the campaign for women's suffrage in the 1910s. Without the vote, they argued, American working women would remain dependent on others to pass laws that concerned them. With it, they could make their first strides toward taking control of their own lives. Years of community and labor movement activism had made the four keenly aware that the interests of working women were distinct from those of working men and of women reformers. And because economic and political power imbalances put working women at a disad-

vantage when they allied with either group, their own unique concerns were rarely voiced. The attraction of suffrage was simple: well-orchestrated use of the vote promised to increase their power and independence in relation to employers, to the state, and to their often-manipulative allies.

The simple but powerful allure of the vote drew working women into the suffrage movement in great numbers during the second decade of the century. With their militancy and youthful energy, they revitalized a movement that had gone stale, helping to provide the surge that finally pushed woman suffrage over the top in 1920. Their interest in the vote and in legislative solutions to working women's problems was piqued during the 1909-15 strikes by exposure to wealthy suffragists like Alva Belmont and to the middle-class suffragists in the Women's Trade Union League. But their attraction to suffrage predated their participation in cross-class women's alliances, and their reasons for seeking the vote were their own. Asserting their difference and their equality, they argued that working women were the real experts on working women and should be given a voice in making the policies that affected them. That, they insisted, was just common sense.

As early as 1907, Rose Schneiderman had articulated a working woman's suffrage position at the First Convention of Women Trade Unionists. "It is the belief of the Trade Union Women . . . that the time has come when working women . . . must be enfranchised and so secure political power to shape their own labor conditions." But winning the vote was only the first stage in a more fundamental transformation.²

Industrial feminism posited a reciprocal relationship between economic and political rights. As Schneiderman saw it, the vote was an essential tool if working women were to free themselves "from the drudgeries and worries which come with long hours and low wages." But "industrial citizenship"—decent wages, safe conditions, reasonable hours—would be only the first victory in working women's battle to win their larger "right to citizenship." Schneiderman envisioned that right as a complex entitlement that included "the right to be born well, the right to a carefree and happy childhood, the right to education, the right to mental, physical and spiritual growth and development."³

This assertion of their entitlements as women, as workers, and as citizens created conflicts between working women and their allies. There were clashes with middle- and upper-class feminists who sought to dictate working women's politics and with men in the labor and Socialist movements whose votes women were forced to campaign for. Painful and draining, these conflicts were also fruitful because they helped working-class suffragists to clarify the issues of greatest concern to the working women they represented: good wages, safe

conditions, and shorter hours; an end to sex-based pay differentials and segregation of the labor force; equal access to education; and greater power within the labor unions. Tying these goals to the attainment of woman suffrage, Schneiderman, Newman, Lemlich, and Cohn fleshed out the contours of the industrial feminist vision.

The early 1910s were a time of tremendous expansion and excitement in the suffrage movement. A restrained and refined style of campaigning was beginning to give way to a more outrageous and colorful one, featuring parades, street-corner rallies, and civil disobedience. The surge of energy and militancy that culminated in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 has often been attributed to the influence of British suffragists. British women's penchant for headline-grabbing activities, such as hunger strikes, and their flamboyance on speaking tours through the United States did generate great excitement among American suffragists. But there was another vitally important source of fresh energy that has been almost entirely overlooked in analyses of the U.S. woman's suffrage movement: working-class women, who brought to the movement both a new perspective on suffrage and a provocative, street-smart campaign style.⁴

Their suffrage agitation, shaped by their lives as women and as workers, was the very opposite of genteel. Custom-tailored by and for their own class, it was gritty, sarcastic, and confrontational. That tone is captured in snapshots that provide an important counterpoint to the silk-stocking image of the women's suffrage movement: Rose Schneiderman bringing tears to the eyes of hardened union men on her suffrage swing through the industrial cities of Ohio; Clara Lemlich on a soapbox outside factory doors, enlivening weary women workers with a stump speech or relishing her verbal duels with jeering men coming off their shifts; Pauline Newman addressing immigrant housewives on Lower East Side street corners or holding heartfelt, late-night talks about suffrage with cold and ragged Illinois coal-mining families.

Time and again they assured listeners that fighting for women's suffrage was not a distraction from the class struggle but a part of it. Even Fannia Cohn, who was not as passionate a suffragist as the others, made this case. Although Cohn was more interested in changing consciousness than in changing laws, she argued for suffrage to enhance the power of the working class.⁵

But there were limitations to their empowerment argument. While working-class suffragists ceaselessly hammered away at themes of class and gender in their speeches, they virtually ignored questions of ethnicity and race. They may have followed this strategy in part because they believed that the vote could unite working women across ethnic lines; thus they avoided such potentially divisive issues as ethnicity, religion, and race. Perhaps, too, they sought to

downplay their immigrant backgrounds in the interest of seeming more American. Whatever their reasoning, it is striking that these immigrant women failed even to raise the questions of ethnicity and race in their suffrage campaigns. This omission is surprising given their own experience with anti-Semitism. It is astonishing given that high-profile U.S. suffragists were then demanding the vote to counteract the influence of "all the riff-raff of Europe that is poured upon our shores."⁶

In the end, industrial feminists' avoidance of race in their suffrage arguments must be seen as a willful narrowness of vision. Afforded the luxury to ignore race, they did. The matter could not simply have escaped their notice. Racist justifications for giving women the vote were at least as common as xenophobic ones. Indeed, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the country's largest suffrage group, had adopted a policy intended to appease its southern members: during an era when southern states actively blocked blacks from voting, NAWSA declared that each state should have the power to decide who could vote. Working-class suffragists must have been aware of those policies as well as contemporaneous struggles by African American women, who sought the vote in order to combat Jim Crow segregation laws and to pass a federal antilynching bill.⁷

Still, their failure to address these issues was probably more a question of focus than a conscious political decision. For white working-class women like Newman, Schneiderman, Lemlich, and Cohn, commitment to suffrage was deeply rooted in their personal experience as workers and as residents of overcrowded slum neighborhoods. Their paramount concern was to improve the intolerable conditions under which they lived and labored. Despite their own experiences with anti-Semitism and xenophobia, most working-class suffragists in New York seemed to identify class and gender, not their immigrant Jewish or Catholic backgrounds, as the primary sources of their oppression. And they were not wrong. Xenophobic and anti-Semitic comments were not, after all, comparable to the codified racist legal structure of Jim Crow.

When working-class suffragists encountered explicit racism, they often confronted it squarely—as at the 1909 national WTUL convention, when a San Francisco delegate called for a resolution to ban Asians from the United States. In response, Rose Schneiderman rose to deliver a blistering denunciation of racism. "The movement we stand for is the brotherhood of man, and we are not going to exclude certain people from that brotherhood on the account of color, degree or caste." Schneiderman responded, too, when African American women asked Local 25 to help them get jobs in the garment industry after the 1909 strike. In addition to helping individual women, she prodded the League to declare its intent to reach out to African American

women in large numbers. She wasn't the League's only civil rights advocate; Leonora O'Reilly was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁸

But neither Schneiderman nor other working-class white suffragists argued for the vote as a weapon to improve the condition of black Americans. And it was not until suffrage was won that they or the League made a serious effort to unionize blacks. Industrial feminists would become more vocal on the issue of race by the end of the decade. Indeed, after 1920 they would lead the way among white trade unionists in their efforts to reach out to black women workers. But during the early 1910s, their suffrage arguments were limited by a shop-floor and community experience that was overwhelmingly white.⁹

There were other limitations to the working-class suffrage argument. Skeptical suffragists like Fannia Cohn believed that suffrage was, by definition, a surface-level reform. Certain problems were difficult to legislate away, she warned, and would still have to be addressed after the vote was won: women's lack of self-confidence; the assumption by employers and union leaders that women would leave jobs after they married; sexual harassment on the job; and sexism in society and in the labor movement. The vote was just a small first step.

Still, by the early 1910s, most working-class women organizers had come to see the vote as essential to their empowerment. Clara Lemlich explained why:

The manufacturer has a vote; the bosses have votes; the foremen have votes, the inspectors have votes. The working girl has no vote. When she asks to have a building in which she must work made clean and safe, the officials do not have to listen. When she asks not to work such long hours, they do not have to listen. The bosses can say to the officials: "Our votes put you in office. . . . Never mind what they say[,] . . . they can't do anything." That is true. For until the men in the Legislature at Albany represent her as well as the bosses and the foremen, she will not get justice; she will not get fair conditions. That is why the working-woman now says that she must have the vote.¹⁰

NEW YORK CITY GARMENT WORKERS IN THE
WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT, 1907-1920

Prior to the early twentieth century, most U.S. working women had responded ambivalently at best to the arguments made by middle- and upper-class suffragists. It was therefore surprising to just about everyone when a working-class suffrage movement appeared in New York in the 1910s. A variety of

factors account for its rise. Perhaps most important was the emergence for the first time of a solid core of working-class suffrage organizers, among whom Schneiderman, Newman, Lemlich, and O'Reilly were the most prominent. In the eyes of working people, these well-known trade unionists lent immeasurable credibility to the campaign for women's suffrage.

The new working-class suffrage movement was further catalyzed by the militancy of young women garment workers between 1909 and 1915 and by the unusually sympathetic interaction the women's garment strikes promoted between workers and middle-class feminists. This convergence created both strength and discord. Middle- and upper-class women provided money to pay wage-earning women to agitate for women's suffrage, and they helped working women establish political contacts. But they were surprised and offended when the organizers they had helped used the language of class struggle to argue for their right to vote. From its inception, the working women's suffrage movement spoke in a distinctly different voice from that used by more affluent suffragists. That voice has been largely drowned out in histories of the women's suffrage movement. Only by restoring it can we gain an accurate understanding of the decade before the vote was won.

As suffrage historians have illustrated, middle-class arguments for suffrage changed dramatically between the Seneca Falls Equal Rights Convention of 1848 and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Mid-nineteenth-century suffrage claims were based on notions of innate and inalienable human rights. In that egalitarian spirit, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony attempted to bring working women into the suffrage movement as early as the 1860s.

After the Civil War they began seeking support from trade union federations, including the National Labor Union (NLU). Their overtures sparked a debate about suffrage among unionized women shoe workers in New England, but no real cross-class alliance developed. A few members of the women shoe workers' union, the Daughters of St. Crispin, argued that laboring women needed the vote. But male NLU members overwhelmingly opposed women's suffrage. And many women workers echoed the sentiments of the stitcher "Tryphosia," who wrote to the *Lynn (Massachusetts) Record* in 1874 that class unity was too important to endanger by suggesting that working women were not effectively represented by their husbands, fathers, and brothers.¹¹

By the late nineteenth century there was little pretense of cross-class solidarity in the suffrage movement. Important middle-class suffrage leaders, including Stanton, had grown increasingly elitist in their views. Stanton called for educational restrictions on who could vote. Some younger suffrage leaders,

like Carrie Chapman Catt, strayed even farther from the old arguments for innate equality, echoing racist diatribes about the "menace" of "the ignorant foreign vote." At the same time, wealthy suffragists like Alva Belmont, Anne Morgan, and Mary Putnam Jacobi suggested that elite women might use the vote to increase the influence of "the better sort" in city, state, and federal governments. Such arguments further alienated working women from the U.S. suffrage movement.¹²

There was, however, one philosophical strain of the suffrage movement that attracted them: the reform-oriented feminism of women like settlement house pioneer Jane Addams, National Consumer League secretary Florence Kelley, and New York WTUL founders Mary and Margaret Dreier. These Progressives were sympathetic to young women workers and shared their commitment to industrial reform. Their arguments were pragmatic and specific: women voters, they believed, could enact a wide range of social and political changes, from prohibiting child labor to abolishing war. That vision encouraged working-class women to think not only about voting and lobbying but about working within government.

The alliance was tricky, however, for the lives of even sympathetic middle-class reformers were so far removed from the average working woman that the gap between them sometimes seemed unbridgeable. At times Florence Kelley's arguments sounded nearly identical to those of Schneiderman or Newman. As early as the 1890s she had insisted that working women deserved the vote because they had "the right to a voice in their own affairs." But she was also capable of referring to the questionable political judgment of "the ignorant, illiterate, debased foreign women."¹³

Such characterizations convinced working-class suffragists that they needed to speak for themselves. Their message was simple: through careful wielding of the vote, they could finally force legislators and employers to heed their concerns. The advantages of enfranchisement seemed painfully obvious to wage-earning suffragists like Pauline Newman. Decades later, remembering how irritated she felt when male Socialists and trade unionists would ask her why she was bothering with such a paltry goal, Newman grew annoyed all over again. "I was a woman, I worked and I had a brain," she recalled tersely. Radical men could afford to dismiss the vote; they already had it. Just because they were struggling to attain the same privilege, Newman argued, in no way diminished working women's commitment to Socialism or to gaining more power in and through their unions.¹⁴

Newman and Schneiderman had begun actively campaigning for women's suffrage well before "mink brigade" suffragists like Alva Belmont began proselytizing working women during the 1909 shirtwaist strike. Newman had used

her 1908 run as the Socialist Party's candidate for secretary of state of New York to raise consciousness among Socialists about women's suffrage. And Schneiderman had begun talking to working women about the vote as early as 1907, when she was drawn into the suffrage movement by WTUL member Harriot Stanton Blatch.¹⁵

Blatch, one of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughters, had spent twenty years in England, where she came to believe that the poor should have a voice in improving their own living and working conditions. She opposed her mother's support for educational restrictions and was offended both by anti-immigrant suffrage arguments and by the notion that wealthy women should use the vote to take care of the "little daughters of the poor," as Anne Morgan called them. Insisting that the poor could offer more realistic solutions to their problems than the rich, Blatch founded the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women to attract working women to the suffrage movement.¹⁶

Rose Schneiderman quickly became the Equality League's most popular speaker, and Leonora O'Reilly became its first vice president. These two Socialist firebrands, both known for their eloquence, infused Blatch's organization with verve and helped transform New York suffragism from a parlor project into a militant streetwise movement. Schneiderman also brought the first factory workers into the ranks of the Equality League, which had been dominated by influential intellectuals like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Florence Kelley. By convincing her Capmakers Union local and other women's unions to affiliate, she hoped to alter the deeply middle-class character of the organization.¹⁷

Schneiderman's success with the Equality League brought her to the attention of the American Suffragettes. Formed by actresses, teachers, writers, and social workers, the American Suffragettes were generally less affluent than the members of the Equality League. Schneiderman became a featured speaker at American Suffragette street meetings. At her suggestion, they became the first suffrage organization to distribute literature in Yiddish to the women of the Lower East Side.¹⁸

But tensions inevitably developed between the two classes of working women involved in suffrage agitation. By 1910, the Equality League included both trade union women, who wanted to pass labor legislation, and inspectors and administrators for city and state government, who framed and enforced those laws. To a lesser extent, these same tensions divided the American Suffragettes. Professional women—who were, by and large, well educated, economically comfortable, and native-born—had a different view of sexual equality than did factory workers.

These differences foreshadowed the bitter divisions that would emerge

after suffrage was won, when the National Woman's Party (NWP) called for an Equal Rights Amendment. Such conflicts stemmed largely from class-based power differentials: professional and upper-class women sought equal access to the power, money, and prestige that their husbands and brothers already wielded. Working-class women wanted to use the vote to redistribute that power to the working class as a whole.

The speeches and writings of working-class suffragists echoed the philosophy of one of their mentors, former cloakmaker Theresa Malkiel. In 1908, Malkiel described the Socialist woman's view of suffrage: "The ballot, though an absolute necessity in her struggle for freedom, is only one of the aims toward her goal. We cannot renovate a garment by turning over one of the sleeves—the whole of it must be turned inside out. And this renovation is possible under a Socialist regime only."¹⁹

This view, which put the vote in the service of Socialism, was simply not acceptable to most members of even the sympathetic suffrage organizations. More than most mainstream suffragists, Harriot Stanton Blatch appreciated the contribution of working-class women to the early-twentieth-century women's movement. She believed that "it is the women of the industrial class . . . who have been the means of bringing about the altered attitude of public opinion toward women's work in every sphere of life." But she was not comfortable with the class-based politics of many trade union suffragists. Fearful of losing her wealthy supporters, Blatch decided to keep the Equality League free of the taint of Socialism. The American Suffragettes, too, decided to ban "socialist propaganda." Schneiderman continued to speak at Suffragette and Equality League meetings, but she had to be careful about what she said. By 1910 it was clear that factory workers would have no real say in creating policy in either organization. Indeed, during the early 1910s Socialist suffragists like Schneiderman, Newman, Lemlich, and O'Reilly were hard-pressed to find a forum for their arguments.²⁰

Socialist Party leaders, though officially in favor of women's suffrage, considered the vote a bourgeois issue. Hoping to defuse the hostility and promote a rapprochement between suffragism and Socialism, Pauline Newman and other Socialist suffragists convened a party conference in December 1909. At issue was whether Socialist women should cooperate with mainstream suffrage organizations. In the months leading up to the conference, a debate raged in the *New York Call*, New York's Socialist daily. Anita Block, editor of the *Women's Page*, summed up the view held by Socialist suffragists: "It is very true that . . . a stronger bond exists between working women and men of their own class than between them and idle women of the leisure class. But these arguments do not do away with the fact that women are deprived of the vote as

a SEX, regardless of class, and that Socialist women can never effectively help their CLASS till their SEX has been enfranchised."²¹

Still, Block believed that Socialist suffragists needed to carve out a course independent of mainstream suffrage organizations. Schneiderman and O'Reilly disagreed. Let working women freely choose their political allies, Schneiderman urged. They had too few resources, she insisted, to cut themselves off from potential supporters. As trade unionists, she and O'Reilly felt that pragmatic considerations had to supersede ideological purity.

But many Socialists feared that cooperation with "bourgeois suffragists" would give working women the false sense that the vote was all they needed, draining vitality from the class struggle. Block warned, "Freedom from sex slavery does not mean freedom from wage slavery." There is no record of how Pauline Newman voted; but given her party activism over the next few years—she organized Socialist Party suffrage meetings across the Northeast and Midwest from 1909 to 1913—it seems reasonable to assume that she sided with those who called for separate, Socialist-controlled suffrage work. Schneiderman and O'Reilly's faction was soundly defeated. Forced to choose, they would ultimately join the ranks of the mainstream suffrage movement.²²

More immediately, the two women decided that the time had come to create a suffrage organization run by and for factory workers. On March 22, 1911—three days before the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire—they founded the Wage Earners' League for Woman Suffrage. Waistmakers Clara Lemlich and Mollie Schepps and laundry worker Maggie Hinchey were co-founders. O'Reilly, the group's senior member and a street-corner speaker par excellence, was elected president of the Wage Earners' League, and Clara Lemlich became its vice president. As stated in the founding document, the league's goals were threefold: "to urge working women to understand the necessity for the vote, to agitate for the vote, and to study how to use the vote when it has been acquired." Through their speeches and pamphlets, the league's organizers sought to give working women some quick civics lessons and to encourage their participation in the political process.²³

Hoping to prevent the silencing of working women that had occurred in other suffrage organizations, the league's founders agreed that only workers could be full voting members. Other women could join, but they would have no say in shaping the league's campaigns, its literature, or its speeches. Also, the officers decided to focus their attentions on factories and immigrant neighborhoods. As a result, the league came to have a thoroughly working-class membership. However, the organization's few non-working-class members provided most of its budget and thereby wielded considerable control over its

politics. They pressured Wage Earners' League officers to affiliate with the National American Woman Suffrage Association rather than their more obvious ally—the Socialist Party Women's Committee. Forced by both Socialist and mainstream suffragists to choose sides, the Wage Earners' League aligned with those who offered financial support.

While the Wage Earners' League and its affluent allies were hammering out their tenuous alliance, the Socialist Party Women's Committee began its own campaign to convert working women to suffragism. This effort was spearheaded by Theresa Malkiel and Pauline Newman. Shortly after the party's suffrage conference, Malkiel began to build a network of Socialist suffrage clubs around New York City. By the spring of 1911 there were active branches throughout Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. The clubs, which held dances, musical performances, and rallies, had an active membership numbering in the thousands. But as Malkiel herself dispiritedly admitted, most of the women who joined these clubs were already members of the Socialist Party. Malkiel and Newman were discouraged that their message did not seem to be reaching unaffiliated working women.²⁴

The Wage Earners' League had more success in that regard, largely because its leaders were talking up suffrage to the same women workers they were then unionizing. The group's success was also a tribute to the grit and explosive speaking style of its chief organizer, Clara Lemlich. Lemlich, who had been bouncing from job to job since the 1909 strike, had been hired as a full-time organizer at the behest of Jessie Ashley, a wealthy Socialist Party activist who was also, despite party proscriptions, treasurer of NAWSA. In 1911, Ashley argued in *Woman's Journal* that "if the working girls ever become really alive to their situation, they will throw themselves into the fight for the ballot in overwhelming numbers and on that day the suffrage movement will be swept forward by the forces that command progress." To hasten that day, Ashley gave historian Mary Beard money to pay the salary of a working-class suffrage organizer. Beard knew just who she would approach.²⁵

During the 1909 strike, attracted by her fervor and her speaking ability, historians Charles and Mary Beard had offered Lemlich tuition for college. Torn between her desire for an education and her commitment to the movement, Lemlich refused. After the strike, when she was blacklisted by employers, Lemlich organized intermittently for the ILGWU and for the WTUL. But she could not find a full-time job. In early 1911, Mary Beard made Lemlich another offer: to advocate for suffrage in New York's union halls and immigrant neighborhoods. Lemlich eagerly accepted.²⁶

Despite their high hopes, relations between the two women quickly soured. Even Beard's early enthusiasm for Lemlich displayed a trace of the condescen-

sion that would soon bring them to loggerheads. "She seems to me to be keen about it," Beard wrote to Leonora O'Reilly, "and does everything that's suggested and does it well, I think. Of course, we don't want to spoil her." Within a few months, Beard had come to regret hiring the hot-headed former shirt-waist maker. Less than one year after she had sought Lemlich out, Beard unceremoniously fired her.²⁷

In a letter to O'Reilly, Beard explained her decision. She had, she said, overestimated Lemlich's ability. Now she was worried that if she waited any longer to fire her, Lemlich would not be able to find seasonal work in the garment factories. Sadly, Beard concluded, Lemlich was not cut out for greater glory than she could find behind a sewing machine.

I am anxious to be fair to the girl and do all I can for her but it seems to me that she can't swing her job. She seems to be unequal physically to the nervous strain of organizing or speaking and you know her mental makeup without my going into that. I do not see how her future is to be a success as a speaker. If she goes on hoping until November after her factory season has begun, she may be left helpless upon my hands. . . . It has been my dream to develop working women to be a help in the awakening of their class, but Clara can't make good along the lines she has attempted this winter it seems to me. She has no initiative.²⁸

Lemlich was, as might be expected, very bitter about the experience. She never singled out Beard in describing to her daughter the ups and downs of her suffrage campaigns. But Martha Schaffer recalls that her mother was still angry decades later about the patronizing attitudes of the more affluent suffragists she worked with:

She had a hard time with some of the suffragettes because at the time of the strike and for years after that she felt that she was being manipulated by these "very rich ladies." She felt that they didn't talk about her union with the respect that they should have. They said the same things that the men did. "Oh, if they were handling it it would have been much better." And they'd say to her, "You're not so very educated. We're college born and bred. Let us tell you how to run your strike." And she was very militant about this. She was very upset about this. And she'd tell them, "Just because we're poor doesn't mean that we're dumb."²⁹

Given Lemlich's uncompromising politics and prickly nature, it seems likely that her problems with Beard originated in a battle of wills. Perhaps Beard asked Lemlich to tone down the Socialist rhetoric in her speeches and the militant garment worker refused. Or maybe Beard tried to tell Lemlich how to

talk to women workers and Lemlich blew up. Holding her own was a matter of principle to the former waistmaker. Her feelings were complicated by discomfort at having to depend on the largess of affluent women. Lemlich had proudly refused the Beards' offer back in 1910 to send her to college, yet she was never able to shake a sense of shame about her minimal education. As a result, she bristled at any insinuation—whether real or imagined—that affluent women's superior education gave them the right to tell her how to organize women of her own class.

Lemlich had a distorted view of how much power and privilege someone like Mary Beard, a college professor's wife, actually enjoyed. However, it is not hard to understand why. Though Beard was by no means a "very rich lady," as Lemlich described her, she nevertheless had the power to hire and fire the veteran organizer. Lemlich would continue to organize women for the rest of her life, but after her suffrage experience she decided to work only with women of her own class.

Working-class suffragists could not as easily dismiss the condescension of Socialist and trade union men, because their votes were needed to pass state-wide women's suffrage referenda. At best, labor union and Socialist men were ambivalent about woman suffrage. At worst, they were openly hostile. Pauline Newman remembers Socialist men disrupting her street-corner suffrage speeches by yelling, "Why don't you go home and wash the dishes?" And devout union men pelted Clara Lemlich with rotten tomatoes when they saw her talking up suffrage to women workers outside their factories.³⁰

Though the Socialist Party, the AFL, the New York State Federation of Labor, and the ILGWU all officially supported woman suffrage, individual leaders denounced working-class organizers for wasting time that should be devoted to the class struggle. Rose Schneiderman received this letter from Socialist Max Fruchter shortly after the founding of the Wage Earners' League. Fruchter admired Schneiderman and thought she was squandering her talents on a frivolous distraction.

You cannot possibly serve two Gods—you cannot fill efficiently two places in two movements—you cannot at the same time be the chief of a great clerical force and do . . . routine work. You either work for Socialism and as a result for equality of the sexes or you work for woman suffrage only and neglect Socialism. Then you act like a bad doctor who pretends to cure his patient by removing the symptom instead of removing the disease. . . . You are approaching a dangerous place; bewildered you are misled by the phosphoric light of a paltry reform. . . . It is time to return to the solid unyielding highway of class consciousness.³¹

Schneiderman, Lemlich, Newman, and other working-class suffragists responded to such arguments with one of their own: that Socialists and trade unionists could not afford to ignore sex-based political inequality. As long as women were denied the right to vote, they insisted, the working class would be denied its full share of political power. Until that changed, it would be severely crippled in its attempts to win the most basic human rights. Rose Schneiderman recalled, "My theme in all my suffrage speeches was that I did not expect any revolution when women got the ballot, as men had had it all these years and nothing of great importance had happened. But women needed the vote because they needed protection through laws. Not having the vote, the lawmakers could ignore us."³²

Despite such practical arguments, working-class women did sometimes see suffrage as a panacea. Perhaps they became caught up in the excitement of a seventy-year-old movement about to bear fruit. Or maybe it was a sense of pride deriving from their own successful strikes. But as this 1911 leaflet illustrates, the Wage Earners' League was not above suggesting that all manner of social ills might be cured if working women got the vote:

Why are you paid less than a man?
 Why do you work in a fire trap?
 Why are your hours so long?
 Why are you all strap hangers when you pay for a seat?
 Why do you pay the most rent for the worst houses?
 Why do your children go into factories?
 Why don't you get a square deal in the courts?
 BECAUSE YOU ARE A WOMAN AND HAVE NO VOTE.
 VOTES MAKE THE LAW
 VOTES ENFORCE THE LAW
 THE LAW CONTROLS CONDITIONS
 WOMEN WHO WANT BETTER CONDITIONS MUST VOTE³³

This leaflet, like everything the Wage Earners' League published, consciously appealed to housewives as well as to wage-earning women. Organizers hoped that involvement in the women's suffrage movement would be an education for all working-class women, including those who were not involved in the labor movement. In a handbill to publicize Suffrage Week, September 1-9, 1911, the organization spoke directly to working-class housewives, trying to spark their interest in the larger good.³⁴ The handbill asked women: Would you ensure child welfare for "all children everywhere" or only your own children at home? Do you want "pure food from cow to kitchen" or in the kitchen only? Would you bring about clean streets and lowered cost of

living "by direct action on laws and lawmakers" or by indirect influence? Don't you think "equal pay for all women who toil" should be a given rather than a privilege? Can you bring about the "abolition of white slave traffic" by "fighting it [or] by ignoring it"? Do you want "sanitary conditions for homes, factories, shops" or for your home only? Do you want peace in the home or "throughout the world"?³⁵

It is difficult to know how effective such leaflets were; there is no record of the response to them. What is clear from officers' records is that the Wage Earners' League did not have the money to print more than an occasional leaflet or handbill. Unable to match the flamboyant displays of some of New York's more affluent suffrage organizations, the working-class suffrage movement won new adherents largely on the strength of its talented speakers. Too poor to rent meeting halls, the group capitalized on the crowded street corners of New York neighborhoods and relied on relatively small outdoor meetings as its primary organizing tool. Immigrants were comfortable with street meetings; they provided free entertainment as well as information, and they were much more conducive to audience participation than formal theater settings.

During 1911 and 1912, Clara Lemlich, Leonora O'Reilly, and Mollie Schepps spoke regularly outside factories as shifts were changing. At night they went into workers' neighborhoods, where their words would reach housewives coming home from their shopping. O'Reilly, who Newman said "sounded as though she had tears in her voice," and Lemlich, whose Yiddish was described by one reporter as "eloquent even to American ears," knew how to get even harried mothers to stop and listen. They told wrenching stories about the misfortunes and humiliations of poor women and painted dazzling visions of the change that would be possible if those same women were given the vote.³⁶

As prosuffrage enthusiasm built among working women, the leaders of the Wage Earners' League began to feel that they had enough support to pull off a mass meeting. With funding from the Collegiate Equal Suffrage League, another group of middle-class allies, Wage Earners' League officers planned a rally to protest the New York State legislature's failure to pass a resolution endorsing women's suffrage. The rally was structured in an interesting way. Rather than giving a series of random speeches, O'Reilly, Lemlich, Schneiderman, and several other working-class speakers would each take on an argument made by one of the state senators who had spoken against suffrage.

The handbill promised an entertaining evening as the league's best speakers answered the "sentimentality of New York Senators" with the "common sense of working women." Setting the tone for the event, the leaflet sought to generate anger and excitement: "They forgot all about the 400,000 working

women in New York City. They forgot the 800,000 working women in New York State. Come just to show the gentlemen we have arrived."³⁷

Wage Earners' League supporters leafleted the factory districts in the weeks preceding the event. The result was an overflow crowd, composed almost entirely of working women. On the night of April 22, 1912, Cooper Union's Great Hall of the People—where, two and a half years earlier, the waistmakers had begun their uprising—was once again filled with thousands of cheering women. The speakers were witty, sarcastic, and impassioned. Though they focused on different issues, each speaker ultimately returned to the theme that was at the heart of every working-class argument for suffrage: women's need for independence. The working woman could not and should not, they argued, depend on anyone else to protect her. She had to watch out for herself, and the vote would enable her to do that.³⁸

That night, industrial feminists laid out the "commonsense" argument for suffrage in all its dimensions, while aggressively debunking antisuffrage views that were based on what they considered romantic nonsense about women. Several of the senators had waxed poetic about the need to protect women from the vote, saying it would disturb marital harmony, sully female moral purity, and rob women of their femininity. Speakers warned that such flowery notions disguised an ironclad trap used to keep working women powerless and voiceless.

Shirtwaist organizer Mollie Schepps, who had entered the public eye as a leader of the 1909 strike, challenged one senator's claim that "there is nobody to whom I yield in respect and admiration and devotion to the sex." Reminding the audience of the brutal treatment the striking waistmakers had received at the hands of New York City police and judges, Schepps retorted, "This is the kind of respect, admiration and devotion we receive from our admirers . . . when we fight for a better condition and a decent wage."³⁹ There are some, Schepps continued, who claim that if women's salaries were made equal to men's, women would be more likely to work outside the home, thus degrading the sanctity of marriage. "If long, miserable hours and starvation wages are the only means men can find to encourage marriage," she observed dryly, "it is a very poor compliment to themselves."⁴⁰

Clara Lemlich answered the legislator who claimed that "we want to relieve women of the burdens and responsibilities of life." Not every woman worker has the option of being financially supported, Lemlich began. In New York City alone, she asserted, there were tens of thousands of single working women, divorced women, and widows with children. The senators don't even pretend to care about their burdens, she declared. "Have men relieved women

of their burdens and responsibilities? I don't think so." Terrible factory conditions degrade relations between men and women far more than women's suffrage ever could, she argued, by forcing women into bad marriages: "Many a girl who has worked years at a machine trying to live decently, at last sees the only way to get out of the factory is to think of marriage. Now how do you like such a marriage? She is ready to give herself to any man who will make the offer!" Even in good marriages, Lemlich insisted, few working-class women could be described as free of burdens or responsibilities. Indeed, many of them have to work in factories in addition to taking care of their homes. "I am sorry to say that there are thousands of working girls who are soon disappointed, because many girls, thousands of girls, right after they are married have to go back into the factory because their husbands are not making enough to keep them; out she goes to the factory to help carry the man's burdens as well as her own. When she has children she has to be the mother to the children, the housekeeper if you please, and go to the factory as well."⁴¹

As for the senators' concern about the potentially deleterious effect of suffrage on female purity, Lemlich observed archly that the low wages that force women into prostitution have a far worse effect on their morality:

There are two moralities, one for men and one for women. Have you noticed when a man comes across a fallen woman what he does to take the burden off her back? Does he claim that he is responsible or acknowledge at least that men are responsible? Does he help her? No, he takes advantage of her if possible. If she becomes a woman of the streets and is arrested, the judge fines her and the woman who has no other means of getting money has to go out and sell herself again in order to pay the court. That is man's protection of unfortunate woman every time.

Men in power used this dual moral code to oppress working women both as a class and as a sex, Lemlich concluded. But working women were no longer willing to accept this: "Does this Senator, think that we . . . do not know that every class that ever lived on another always told the slaves that it was good for them to be slaves? . . . It is too late. We are here Senators. We are 800,000 strong in New York State alone." Using concerted protest and the vote, Lemlich said, working women could address economic injustice and cut through the cant about femininity that denied their experience and their dignity.⁴²

Rose Schneiderman expanded Lemlich's class-based attack on popular notions of femininity. Rising to her full height of 4'9", her red hair glowing under the stage lights, Schneiderman lashed into the senator who had stated, "Get women into the arena of politics with its alliances and distressing contests—

the delicacy is gone, the charm is gone, and you emasculate women." The pragmatic Schneiderman had no patience for such romanticized nonsense. She won cheers with an open question: "What does all this talk about becoming mannish signify? I wonder if it will add to my height when I get the vote. I might work for it all the harder if it did. It is just too ridiculous, this talk of becoming less womanly, just as if a woman could be anything else except a woman."

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. She felt that women had distinct skills and values to contribute to the working-class movement and to American society at large. However, she disdained the coercive use of femininity, which required working women to be strong and sexless in the factory but helpless and modest outside it. "It seems to me that the working woman ought to wake up to the truth of her situation; all this talk about women's charm does not mean working women. Working women are expected to work and produce their kind so that they too may work until they die of some industrial disease." The benefits upper-class women derive from adhering to standards of femininity, Schneiderman said bluntly, will never accrue to the working woman. Working women needed to define their own hard-headed notions of femininity, she told her audience, because they could not afford to indulge in romantic fantasies that were intended to enslave them.

Senators and legislators are not blind to the horrible conditions around them. . . . It does not speak well for the intelligence of our Senators to come out with statements about women losing their charm and attractiveness . . . [when] women in the laundries . . . stand thirteen hours or fourteen hours in terrible steam and heat with their hands in hot starch. Surely . . . women won't lose any more of their beauty and charm by putting a ballot in a ballot box once a year than they are likely to lose standing in foundries or laundries all year round.⁴³

The speeches made by Lemlich, Schneiderman, Schepps, and others reflected a maturation and expansion of industrial feminism as a political philosophy. The speakers demanded access to political power and offered a uniquely working-class critique of prevailing proscriptions on feminine behavior. To them the vote was a symbol of what Schneiderman called working women's "right to citizenship." In dissecting the arguments of those who wished to prevent them from voting, they offered a keen analysis of the intersections of class and gender and of the ways that both were manipulated to abridge their rights as citizens.

Ironically, at its moment of greatest visibility, the Wage Earners' League disappeared. There is no further record of its existence. Soon after the Cooper Union meeting, Rose Schneiderman left on a paid speaking tour for another suffrage organization. Three months after the meeting, Mary Beard fired Clara Lemlich, and there is no indication that she looked for a replacement. Other funding for the group may have evaporated due to the lack of a full-time organizer. Whatever the cause of its demise, the Wage Earners' League seems to have sunk without a trace, its former leaders branching out to work for other suffrage organizations.

During the summer of 1912, NAWSA president Anna Howard Shaw hired Rose Schneiderman to tour Ohio's industrial cities and build support among working men for a statewide suffrage referendum. Perhaps, Newman wrote to Schneiderman, "the 'cultured ladies' . . . are beginning to see the necessity of having a working girl tour a State rather than some Professor."⁴⁴ Schneiderman spoke to workers in union halls, on street corners, and in theaters from Toledo to Youngstown. "My argument to them," she later recalled, "was that if their wives and daughters were enfranchised, labor would be able to influence legislation enormously." The Ohio suffrage movement had never seen anything quite like her. A local suffragist described Schneiderman's electric effect on crowds. "We have had splendid speakers here before, but not one who impressed the people as she did. Strong men sat with tears rolling down their faces. Her pathos and earnestness held the audiences spellbound."⁴⁵

They may have cried, but they didn't give her their votes. The 1912 Ohio referendum was soundly defeated, at least in part because it did not win a labor vote. Schneiderman was demoralized. "When my leave was over," she wrote, "I was not sorry to go back to the [Women's Trade Union] League and the White Goods Workers. I had had a very interesting time and had met some wonderful women, but propagandizing is a lonely job, especially for women." It was an irony of the referendum movement, and of the woman suffrage movement generally, that no matter how successful women organizers were at raising consciousness among women, they would win the ballot only if men voted for it. Schneiderman returned to New York, where she, Newman, and O'Reilly began to lay the groundwork for a new alliance between working women and mainstream suffragists.⁴⁶

A 1914 article by Leonora O'Reilly suggests the distance that the debate over cross-class cooperation in the suffrage movement had come in five years. Writing in the *New York Call*, where Socialist women had battled so furiously in 1909 over the question of cooperating with "bourgeois suffragists," O'Reilly laid out a vision of working-class suffragism that clearly reflected a cross-fertilization of middle-class reform ideology and trade unionism:

Abolition of Child Labor
Abolition of the White Slave Trade
Construction of Schools Instead of Armories
Public Playgrounds and Recreation Centers
Abolition of War
The Full Fruit of their Labor for those Who Labor.⁴⁷

The child of this hybrid philosophy was the Industrial Section of the New York Woman Suffrage Party (wsp); this division of the party was founded in 1914 by Schneiderman, O'Reilly, and Pauline Newman.

Unlike the Wage Earners' League, this new group was to be an official arm of the wsp. The relationship meant that all bills would be paid, but it also meant tighter control of political expression. Hoping to prevent the sort of battles that had gotten Clara Lemlich fired by Mary Beard, the founders of the Industrial Section sent Pauline Newman to remind wsp president Carrie Chapman Catt that all three of them were Socialists. According to Newman, Catt was unfazed. "In a way," she said quietly, "we all are." Catt's sympathetic reply notwithstanding, few of the major figures in New York's suffrage movement were comfortable with the trio's politics. Relations between the Industrial Section leaders and the founding mothers of the wsp were almost always strained.⁴⁸

That same year, disputes over class, ethnicity, and politics were also shaking the New York WTUL. In 1914, native-born hat trimmer Melinda Scott defeated Rose Schneiderman in a campaign for the presidency of the New York group. Schneiderman's effectiveness as a suffrage speaker was cited by some upper-class League members as a reason not to vote for her. They insisted that she was too badly needed in the suffrage movement to be spared for the job of League president. Pauline Newman believed that those claims disguised the real objections to Schneiderman: her Judaism and her Socialist politics.⁴⁹

Leonora O'Reilly agreed with Newman. The older Irish activist had never found cooperation with upper-class women smooth or easy. When Mary Beard fired Clara Lemlich two years earlier, O'Reilly had said nothing. Now, furious at the way suffragists in the League were treating Schneiderman, O'Reilly resigned from the Industrial Section. "Paul," she wrote Newman, "I had my shock . . . and I am through. . . . I feel that we ought not to give our time and our brains unless we have our say."⁵⁰

In December 1914, Schneiderman resigned once more from the WTUL. This time the League's executive board decided to let her go. Registering disapproval of the Socialist content of her speeches, the board concluded, "If as VP she felt it important to speak on subjects the League does not stand for . . .

there was no other way open than to accept the resignation." Schneiderman left the League and was soon hired by the ILGWU to fill Newman's old job as general organizer.⁵¹

But before hitting the road for the union, Schneiderman accepted one more assignment for the suffrage movement. In December 1914, she represented working women at a suffragists' meeting with President Woodrow Wilson at the White House. There is no record of what the other women said to Wilson that day, but Schneiderman was typically blunt. To illustrate the urgency of women workers' situation, Schneiderman compared the ravages of factory labor to the butchery then taking place on the World War I battlefields. There is "an industrial war going on," she told the president. "The horrors in Belgium are more spectacular than they are here, perhaps," but only in terms of degree.

To illustrate her point, Schneiderman described the Triangle fire, still fresh in her mind. She cited the statistics on numerous industrial accidents during the previous two years and vividly described recent bloody labor/management confrontations in which workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Ludlow, Colorado, and New York City had been starved, beaten, and killed. Simply to ensure their own safety, she concluded, "working women need to vote." Wilson does not seem to have been moved; it took him over two more years to throw his support behind women's suffrage.⁵²

While Schneiderman switched allegiances, Newman, as was her wont, kept one foot on each side of the line between Socialists and bourgeois suffragists. Though she was a founding member of the Industrial Section, she warned Socialist Party leaders not to "leave this thing to the Suffrage Association." Perhaps bored by staying in one place, Newman embarked on a barnstorming tour through upstate New York, speaking to Socialist audiences about suffrage and reporting her progress regularly in the *New York Call*. Introducing herself as speaking both for the Socialist Party Women's Committee and for the WTUL, Newman repeatedly stressed one of the central themes of the wage earners' suffrage movement: the link between political and economic power. "Woman suffrage should not be regarded as an end in itself. It is only a means to an end. . . . At this time when she is first beginning to wake up to the fact that she is an industrial factor in society, and is, as a consequence, taking her place in the labor movement, when she is beginning to realize her economic power, she will . . . use the ballot to back up that economic power . . . [and] slowly but surely achieve the end—economic freedom."⁵³

Simultaneously, Newman's old partner in Socialist suffrage work, Theresa Malkiel, launched the Socialist Party's first full-scale campaign in New York City. There Malkiel organized three hundred Socialist women, who distributed

125,000 prosuffrage leaflets to East European Jews, Italians, and Poles. This focus on immigrant communities was geared to bring new women into the party. Besides, urban immigrant votes were considered essential to passing a suffrage referendum in New York State, as native-born men in rural districts were expected to vote heavily against it.⁵⁴

Six months before the November 1915 New York suffrage referendum, the WTUL began an all-out campaign to win labor votes in New York. They also targeted New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, where similar referenda were coming up. Maggie Hinchey and Melinda Scott toured the industrial cities of New Jersey, speaking on street corners, at factory gates, and in union halls. Leonora O'Reilly wrote personally to every major labor leader in New Jersey, explaining why woman suffrage was good for the trade union movement. Clara Lemlich crisscrossed New York City, leading street meetings in Jewish immigrant neighborhoods across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Finally, Schneiderman, who was then on the road for the ILGWU, used her position as general organizer to speak with union men in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.⁵⁵

To their dismay, male voters rejected woman suffrage in all four states. Despite the intensive campaigning by Clara Lemlich and others, only two of New York City's districts had approved suffrage; one was the Lower East Side, where the editorials of the strongly prosuffrage *Jewish Daily Forward* probably were more important in getting out the vote than were WTUL organizers. The vote went as expected in upstate farm districts, and the referendum was soundly defeated. The negative vote left Rose Schneiderman angry and disappointed with union men, who clearly had not turned out to vote for woman suffrage.⁵⁶

Her disillusionment was deepened by her three-year stint as general organizer for the ILGWU. At every turn, she told Newman, the union sabotaged her best efforts. In 1916, she informed ILGWU president Benjamin Schlesinger that she had completed preparations for a general strike of Boston waistmakers that she believed was winnable. "I worked for months," Schneiderman wrote later, "holding shop meetings after work, then visiting women in their homes at night." Three days before the strike was supposed to begin, Schlesinger assigned a male organizer to lead it. Schneiderman was furious and sent in her resignation. She wrote Newman, "They have got to be taught . . . that a woman is no rag, and I propose to do it. Think of doing all that worrying and planning and when the task is almost done to send a man in and give him the credit for building the thing up. . . . You know Paul . . . to take the thing out of one's hands after all the hardship and heartache is more than I can stand."

Schlesinger did not accept Schneiderman's resignation, but she knew she

could not continue working for the ILGWU. Accustomed to the closeness of her New York community, she was far less able than Newman had been to tolerate the loneliness of being a woman in a man's world. At the end of 1916, when Leonora O'Reilly decided to step down as chair of the Industrial Section to work on behalf of the Irish Revolution, she offered her old friend the post. Schneiderman jumped at the chance to come home.⁵⁷

As chair of the Industrial Section, Schneiderman swallowed her bitterness over the previous election and pulled out the stops in an attempt to win labor votes for woman suffrage in 1917. She spoke to union men in New York City and upstate, visited union halls, and held spontaneous street meetings in working-class neighborhoods. As O'Reilly had, Schneiderman argued that political disfranchisement made union women weaker negotiators, thus hurting the unions. This time Schneiderman got help from the highest-ranking woman official in the labor movement, ILGWU vice president Fannia M. Cohn.

In the months leading up to the referendum, Cohn published a series of articles in union publications arguing that men who opposed woman suffrage hurt the labor movement. "Our brothers on election day will pronounce judgement on their sisters with whom they work side by side. . . . If you make a difference between women and men politically, employers too make a difference between them on the economic field. . . . But who benefits from this difference being made between men and women—the employers or the workers? . . . Working men refusing to give working women equal political rights are in league with the employers against their sisters."⁵⁸

Like other working-class suffragists, Cohn reminded working men that the interests of their class extended beyond the shop floor or the union hall. Just as upper-class women appealed to the men of their class in terms of class interest, so did a relentlessly class-conscious Cohn. "Giving the wives and daughters of the workers the vote," she wrote, "means giving them the weapon with which they will sooner or later help them to overthrow the present unjust system."⁵⁹

Assuming that some part of their resistance to women's suffrage must stem from ignorance, Schneiderman and the WTUL created a "Suffrage Correspondence Course" to educate male trade unionists about the working women of New York State. The lessons all ended with reviews explaining why they needed the franchise. Lesson 8, for example, noted that in 1910, "of the 3,291,714 women in New York State over fifteen years of age . . . only 1,793,588 were married, and 1,498,156 were unmarried or widowed. A large part of these have to work in order to live and many of them have children or fathers and mothers or sisters and brothers to support." These women, the lesson concluded, required the vote to look after not only their own interests but also those of dependent family members.⁶⁰

Schneiderman followed up on the correspondence course by sending personal letters to the leaders of every union in the state, detailing the conditions of women in their industry. This letter went out to officers of the restaurant workers' union: "There are fifteen thousand restaurant workers in this State without any protection whatsoever. They are waitresses, cooks, kitchen girls and pantry hands. They work any number of hours for small wages and commonly seven days a week, which means 84 hours a week. Women have been known to work 122 hours a week. . . . Give the women working in restaurants the vote in order that when they appear before legislative bodies they will be listened to with respect and have their just demands recognized."⁶¹

After the 1915 debacle, working-class suffragists were unsure, right up to election day, of how labor men would vote. The night before the 1917 election, Schneiderman and her fellow organizers "distributed what seemed . . . millions of circulars at Brooklyn Bridge and other places to people going home from work." Partly because of the intensive campaign among industrial workers, partly because of the nationwide momentum that had converted President Wilson to the cause, the men of New York State this time voted to extend suffrage to women.⁶²

To attract the votes of newly enfranchised women, several state parties nominated women candidates for public office the following year. Pauline Newman was one of these candidates. Ten years after her first campaign, the Socialist Party nominated Newman for Congress. She headed a 1918 Socialist Party ticket that included male candidates for the New York State senate and assembly. Though she lost, Newman ran well ahead of her ticket and was pleased with the turnout. She would periodically run for office again; ten years later, she even joined the race for county sheriff.⁶³

Schneiderman was excited about tapping the power of working women's votes toward a slightly different end: to defeat the most intransigent opponents of legislation protecting women workers. In 1918, she led campaigns to challenge several New York State legislators who had been particularly hostile to bills regulating wages, hours, and working conditions. The tiny woman with the big voice toured New York City neighborhoods, making speeches from the back of a horse-drawn truck as it moved slowly down the streets of each legislator's district. On each side of the truck hung hand-painted banners denouncing particular incumbents.⁶⁴

One such banner read, "Working women ask you to defeat Albert Ottinger [a Republican state senator]. He voted against giving working women in industry a wage that would give them a chance to live in decency and health." Ottinger and three other targeted state legislators were defeated; two were replaced by women who strongly supported social welfare legislation.⁶⁵

The following year, recognizing Schneiderman's fifteen-year role in galvanizing the New York labor movement, the newly formed New York State Labor Party nominated her to run for the U.S. Senate. The Labor Party, created at the 1919 convention of the New York State Federation of Labor, also ran attorney Dudley Malone for governor. Although Schneiderman never expected to win, her candidacy was taken seriously by the mainstream press. The *New York Times* reported the nomination on page 2, under the headline "Woman for Senator is named by Labor."⁶⁶

Unfortunately for Schneiderman and the Labor Party, divisions over gender, ethnicity, and politics within the labor movement badly hurt the campaign. Schneiderman later found that campaign donations by women who specifically wished to support her were channeled secretly into Malone's campaign by Labor Party officials. As for Malone, his campaign ran aground when a strong movement led primarily by Irish Catholics in New York City's largest labor body—the Central Labor Unions Council—resulted in the council's rescinding its endorsement of Malone in favor of Lower East Side favorite Alfred E. Smith, the state's former and future governor.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the 1920 Senate campaign marked the start of a new phase in Rose Schneiderman's career. No longer just a daughter of the Lower East Side, she had become a credible political leader who felt comfortable speaking to the president of the United States and who was conversant on international as well as domestic issues. Indeed, internationalist goals were becoming increasingly important to Schneiderman. Since attending the Paris Peace Conference the previous year—where she and former shoemaker Mary Anderson were the only women trade union delegates—Schneiderman had become interested in forging bonds with European women workers.

At Versailles she had met and befriended Labor Party leader Margaret Bondfield, who would later become England's first woman Minister of Labor. Excited by their new friendship, the two women laid plans for an international conference of working women, which was held in Washington, D.C., in November 1919. It was the first in a series of such conferences and the beginning of a new era in working women's politics, when industrial feminists from both sides of the Atlantic would meet regularly to discuss shared goals.⁶⁸

The domestic goals of Schneiderman's campaign for Senate are also worth noting, for they indicate the extent to which industrial feminism had matured. The platform on which Schneiderman ran was a broad one, emphasizing the relationship between economic and political power, between the home and the workplace. She and other Labor Party candidates proposed a host of government initiatives to cut the cost of living and enhance the quality of life for workers. Her platform called for publicly owned farmers' markets and milk

distribution stations; municipal sales of coal, bread, ice, and milk; creation of a public utility to construct nonprofit housing; and state insurance protection for those facing unemployment, illness, and old age. And in a stance unusual for the labor movement of that era, her platform also called for equal economic, political, and legal rights regardless of race, color, or creed.⁶⁹

It was an ambitious plan of action for a woman who had never gotten beyond the eighth grade, and it reflected the extent to which she had both shaped and been influenced by a broad Progressive vision of reform. But the very breadth of this platform highlighted growing divisions between former allies in the suffrage movement that would burst into open warfare after the Susan B. Anthony Amendment granted U.S. women the vote.

When militant suffragist Alice Paul formed the National Woman's Party in 1920, she set as her major goal an Equal Rights Amendment to the federal constitution. Paul was unresponsive to working-class organizers' arguments that such an amendment might nullify legislation protecting women workers. She was equally uninterested in requests by African American feminists that the suffrage battle be continued until southern blacks—men and women—could safely and easily exercise their right to vote. Paul had decided that sex discrimination would be the sole focus of the NWP. Attempting to deal with issues of class and race, she said, would dilute the party's strength as an advocate for gender equality. This felt like a betrayal to many black and working-class suffragists, for it left all but white women of the middle and upper classes out in the cold.⁷⁰

Industrial feminists were moving in the opposite direction. As the NWP narrowed its political focus, Schneiderman and other working-class leaders were broadening theirs. After a decade of mostly sidestepping the issue of race, Schneiderman and Cohn now began to address it seriously. In the 1920 campaign, Schneiderman and other Labor Party candidates called for a federal antilynching bill and full civil rights for African Americans. During the next two decades, Schneiderman and Cohn would help to found the first interracial trade union committee to fight for full inclusion of African Americans in the labor movement. Toward this end, they would form coalitions with black labor leaders like A. Philip Randolph and would lead the way among white trade unionists in trying to organize black women workers.⁷¹

After 1920, a wide range of issues would divide former allies in the suffrage movement. While woman suffrage was still a distant goal, it had been possible for women of different races, classes, and political views to unite temporarily. But once suffrage was won, disagreements over policy and direction quickly emerged. These divisions did not fall only along lines of class or racial difference; white working-class feminists divided bitterly.

A few, like Josephine Casey and Maggie Hinchey, would fight for an Equal Rights Amendment, thus placing themselves in open conflict with their former industrial feminist colleagues. Others joined opposing camps in the internecine battle between Socialist and Communist trade unionists. Cohn, Newman, and Schneiderman continued working within the union and political party system, although they would not always work together or on the same goals. But Clara Lemlich, who sought more sweeping and radical social change, shifted her allegiance to a new organization: the Communist Party USA. These women's divergent choices created lasting enmities that made it more difficult for them to combat the intense political backlash of the early 1920s.

Despite this backlash, industrial feminism would by no means become moribund in the years after 1920—quite the opposite. The period between the wars would see working-class women's ideas more fully integrated than ever before into the mainstream of progressive U.S. politics. Rose Schneiderman, Pauline Newman, Fannia Cohn, and Clara Lemlich would play a large part in that development. Over the next quarter century they and their middle-class allies would frame and lobby for labor laws that became the underpinnings of the New Deal welfare state. They would also contribute to the creation of new government agencies, worker's schools, and women's neighborhood councils and unions that would institutionalize key pieces of the industrial feminist vision and leave a permanent imprint on U.S. society and politics.

3

PART THREE.

THE ACTIVISTS

IN THEIR PRIME:

THE MAINSTREAMING

OF INDUSTRIAL

FEMINISM,

1920-1945

By 1920 Rose Schneiderman, Pauline Newman, Fannia Cohn, and Clara Lemlich (now Clara Lemlich Shavelson) were no longer idealistic young factory workers dreaming of a brighter future. Schneiderman was thirty-eight years old, Cohn was thirty-five, Lemlich was thirty-four, and Newman was thirty. All of them were feeling a little frayed at the edges from a decade of full-time organizing. They had reached that stage of life when most people begin to crave permanence and some measure of security. After years of organizing, public speaking, negotiating, and formulating political strategy, the four women now sought ways to stabilize their personal and professional lives.

All four yearned for love and emotional support; nevertheless, they were consumed by their political careers and had no desire to give up political activism. They enjoyed the heat of battle far too much to do that. Finding that they had no choice but to politicize their desires, they constructed support networks that met both their emotional and strategic needs. Like many women trying to balance the personal and professional, they turned for intimacy to people who shared their work and their political goals. This was partly because all four were dyed-in-the-wool activists for whom personal and political fulfillment were intertwined. But forming alternative communities was also a way of finding loved ones who would not pressure them to act like "normal" women and devote themselves exclusively to home and hearth. Thus, choices of the heart interacted with and shaped the political trajectory of each woman's life.

As president of both the national WTUL and its New York branch during the 1920s and 1930s, Schneiderman immersed herself in a cross-class world of women. Newman made a somewhat different choice: as health education director for the ILGWU and vice president of the New York and national Leagues, she performed an emotional and political balancing act between the male-dominated union and the women's community of the WTUL. Cohn used her position as secretary of the ILGWU Education Department to establish contacts and build friendships with middle-class educators. Shavelson married, bore three children, and moved to a working-class enclave on the far edge of Brooklyn, where she immediately began trying to radicalize her neighbors.

Both Schneiderman and Newman would continue to organize women workers on a grassroots level throughout this period, but it was no longer their primary political activity. During the 1920s and 1930s they would become ever more deeply involved in lobbying for and framing legislation; they spent as much time working for government agencies as they did organizing trade unions. Government work gave them far greater power than they had been able to achieve through many years of organizing. But it also limited their independence; for as newly "respectable" administrators, they came to fear association with radical movements.

Fannia Cohn was uncomfortable with the choices Newman and Schneiderman made. Though she would work with them and with the WTUL on various projects between 1920 and 1945, she distrusted the idea of a cross-class women's movement. She did not share their reform visions or put great store in legislative strategies for change. Emotionally she needed the badge of working-class militancy that affiliation with a labor union gave her. So she stuck with the ILGWU through lean and fat times, through anti-Communist purges and her own marginalization. From shortly after her election as union vice president in 1916 until the end of her career, Cohn would devote herself to building a nationwide system of trade union-sponsored schools for workers.

By the 1920s and 1930s Cohn would come to be lauded for her educational work by some of the leading educators in the nation. But by eschewing cross-class women's groups, Cohn was left without a female support network. While she found love and a measure of intimacy from others dedicated to the cause of worker education, she did not establish herself in a primary relationship with either a man or a woman. That state of being single, or of being "married to the union," as her colleagues liked to say, left her open to whispers and cruel jokes by male colleagues.

Clara Lemlich, who married printer Joe Shavelson in 1913, was largely cut off from the other three in the years between the two World Wars. She lived with her husband and three children in a working-class family neighborhood at the outer edge of Brooklyn. But it was not marriage, family life, or geography that separated Shavelson from her old industrial feminist allies; it was the unshakeable allegiance she formed to the Communist Party during the early 1920s. Shavelson's activism in the Party made Schneiderman, Newman, and Cohn distrust her as they distrusted all CP organizers, whom they blamed for the divisive battles that nearly destroyed the labor movement during the 1920s.

Despite these differences, the four continued to share an important credo of industrial feminism: the belief that a reciprocal relationship existed between the working-class mother in her home and the wage earner in the shops. So even as they maintained their distance from the Communist Party, they strongly supported the idea of organizing the wives and mothers of union men into tenant and consumer councils. After an arm's-length rapprochement between Communists and Socialists in the mid-1930s, the four would even find themselves working on the same side again—trying to channel the housewife militancy they had seen in their youth into permanent unions of working-class wives and mothers. In this endeavor Clara Lemlich Shavelson outshone all others. A maverick in the CP, as she had been in the union and in the suffrage movement, she had a talent for debate and street-corner oratory that remained red-hot into her sixties.

As a married woman and a mother who left the workplace to raise her family, Clara Lemlich Shavelson more than any of the others would enjoy the comforts of social acceptance. But Shavelson's choices created their own problems. As an industrial feminist whose views of gender were shaped during a period of young women's strikes and nationwide suffrage activism, Shavelson found herself more than a little ambivalent about accepting the traditional roles imposed by marriage and motherhood. Refusing to choose between marriage and politics, Shavelson instead tried to build a movement that politicized the social position of wife and mother. That created tensions in her home. Her husband and children were proud and supportive, but it was not easy either to have or to be an activist mother.

In the years between the attainment of woman suffrage and the end of the Second World War—against a political climate that swung pendulumlike from the conservative backlash of the 1920s through the militant utopianism of the 1930s to the patriotic fervor of the 1940s—the four activists and their allies labored to institutionalize many of the industrial feminist goals first articulated in their young years on the shop floor. They were instrumental in the creation of new government agencies, the passage of labor laws, the development of worker education programs, and the organization of a nationwide network of women's consumer and tenant councils. These institutions had a lasting impact on many facets of U.S. political culture. Still, little attention has been paid to working-class women's part in building them. Tracing the careers of Schneiderman, Newman, Cohn, and Lemlich in the years between the two World Wars can help us understand why. Throughout those years they were forced to navigate obstacles of class, gender, and ethnicity that obscured their contributions even as they were making them. Though their ideas and actions were important to the development of industrial unionism, the welfare state, adult education, and tenant and consumer consciousness, these women never attained the recognition they deserved in their unions, in government, in education, or in the major political parties.

The four women responded to the challenges and obstacles they encountered in very different ways. Their choices reflect the range of options experienced by activist working-class women prior to the Second World War; but they also highlight the lingering impact of the particular background that these four shared. Despite the different choices they made, despite bitter political and personal conflicts with each other, through their middle years Schneiderman, Newman, Cohn, and Lemlich continued working toward shared goals, the basic goals of industrial feminism: organizing working-class women into unions; legislating improved conditions; and offering education to women who had been denied it.

When asked to explain their goals and their politics, all four liked to hark back to the formative experiences of their youths. Pauline Newman captured that feeling of nostalgia and inspiration in her reading of a verse by Louis Untermeyer at a WTUL birthday party for Rose Schneiderman:

Open my ears to music; let
Me thrill with Spring's first flutes and drums;
But never let me dare forget
The bitter ballad of the slums.

For Newman, Untermeyer's poem was more than sentimental fluff. As she moved farther from the shop floor and the militancy of young adulthood, she began to measure herself and other activists against that standard: whether or not they had forgotten the "bitter ballad of the slums."

By the 1920s, the four women had traveled far from the ghetto environs where they grew up. There was less time for stump speeches and grassroots organizing as they became caught up in the nitty-gritty work of institution building, political negotiation, and compromise. All four retained the fire of their early years, even as they evolved politically and culturally. It kept them going long after most others of their generation had given up their activism for more private pursuits. But while it enabled them to accomplish a great deal, their drivenness took a toll on their relationships and on their ability to find peace of mind. That tension between personal and political issues strained and animated the four women's middle years.

4

KNOCKING AT
THE WHITE
HOUSE DOOR:
ROSE SCHNEIDER-
MAN, PAULINE
NEWMAN, AND
THE CAMPAIGN
FOR LABOR
LEGISLATION,
1910-1945

*Imagine me, Feigle Shapiro,
sleeping in Lincoln's bed!
—a New York City
dressmaker invited to
stay at the White House*

CROSS-CLASS WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS AND THE CONTROVERSY OVER LEGISLATING CHANGE

By the end of World War I, Rose Schneiderman and Pauline Newman were feeling worn out by years of constant organizing. Neither woman wanted to abandon union work. But after an exhausting decade on the stump—traveling from city to city, attending late-night meetings, making speeches, teaching the fundamentals of trade unionism to new groups of young women workers, and battling lack of interest among male union leaders—they were drawn by the idea of lobbying for legislation. Union organizing could be excruciatingly slow. It often took years to make any progress. They knew that laws regulating work hours, wages, and safety conditions would improve the lives of many more women than would ever join unions; so they began to devote increasing amounts of time to the pursuit of legislative change.

For Schneiderman and Newman, this shift in political perspective was reinforced by their personal lives. By their mid-thirties it had become clear that the two were not going to marry. Instead they had become part of an unusually tight circle of women friends who shared their politics and their lives. Comprising working-class women, educated middle-class reformers, and one or two women of wealth, this network of friends would run the national WTUL and its New York branch for the next three decades. Drawn together after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 by a shared interest in industrial reform, this cross-class circle emerged from the First World War well positioned to promote their goal of transforming the state into an advocate for women workers.

Some of the women in this network had known each other since the early years of the century. The friendship between Newman and Schneiderman had deepened and solidified in the years since 1905,

44. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, February 24, 1905–February 1, 1909, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.
45. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 84.
46. *Ibid.*, 84–86.
47. *Ibid.*; Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, November 26, 1907, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers; Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters*, 71.
48. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 86; East Side Organizer's Report, Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, August 25, October 27, 1908, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.
49. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, February 28, August 22, November 26, 27, 1907, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers; Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 220.
50. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Committee, November 26, 27, 1907, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.
51. Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 220; Cohen, "Fannia Cohn," 36–43.
52. Scheier, "Clara Lemlich Shavelson."
53. Martha Schaffer, telephone interview by author, March 11, 1989; Joel Schaffer, Evelyn Velson, and Julia Velson, interview by author, Oakland, Calif., September 9, 1992.
54. Scheier, "Clara Lemlich Shavelson."
55. Clara Lemlich Shavelson, interview by Martha and Joel Schaffer, Los Angeles, Calif., February 2, 1974.

CHAPTER 2

1. Mary Brown Sumner, "The Spirit of the Strikers," *The Survey*, January 22, 1910. The strike has been called variously the "uprising" of 20,000, 30,000, or 40,000 women. See Louis Levine [Lewis Lorwin], *The Women's Garment Workers* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1924), chapter titled "The Uprising of the Twenty Thousand"; Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880–1917* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), chapter titled "Uprising of the Thirty Thousand"; and *New York Call*, November 27, 1909, story under the headline "Strike of 40,000."
 2. For information on the many women's strikes of the period, read the WTUL publication *Life and Labor*, which covered them all in some detail; Tamiment Institute Library, New York University, or Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. The magazine *The Survey* (1909–14) also has good coverage of most of the strikes. The 1913 Brooklyn strike is covered by the *Ladies' Garment Worker*. See Pauline Newman, "The White Goods Workers' Strike," *Ladies' Garment Worker* 4, no. 3 (March 1913): 1–4. On the Chicago strike see also Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 194–98. On the Kalamazoo strike see Karen M. Mason, "Feeling the Pinch: The Kalamazoo Corset Makers' Strike of 1912," in *To Toil the Livelong Day: America's Women at Work, 1780–1980*, ed. Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 141–60. On the 1915 Chicago strike see *Chicago Day Book*, cited in Winifred Carsel, *A History of the Chicago Ladies' Garment Workers' Union* (Chicago: Normandie House, 1940), and Ricki Carole Myers Cohen, "Fannia Cohn and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1976).
- On the Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912, which is not discussed here but represents a

key example of working women's activism in that period, see Ardis Cameron, "Bread and Roses Revisited: Women's Culture and Working-Class Activism in the Lawrence Strike of 1912," in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 42–62.

3. Gladys Boone, *The Women's Trade Union Leagues* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 112–14.
4. Mildred Moore, "A History of the Women's Trade Union League of Chicago" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1915), cited in Diane Kirkby, "The Wage-Earning Woman and the State: The National Women's Trade Union League and Protective Labor Legislation, 1903–1923," *Labor History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 54–74.
5. *New York Call*, December 29, 1909.
6. Pauline Newman, "From the Battlefield—Some Phases of the Cloakmakers' Strike in Cleveland," *Life and Labor*, October 1911.
7. Left-wing and labor movement sources have emphasized the strike's importance as a catalyst for unionizing the garment industry. It is often referred to as the "spark" that set off the strike of sixty thousand cloakmakers the following year and paved the way for "protocolism" in the industry. Such accounts have rarely placed the strike on a continuum of working-class women's activism, and they have ignored or discounted the significance of cross-class women's alliances. See Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 302–5; Melvyn Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968); Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 144–67. As early as 1923, Levine noted about the strike that its "hundreds of leaders have remained unnamed and unrecorded" (p. 157).

More recent feminist-Socialist accounts have stressed the importance of the cross-class women's alliances forged during the strike; they have also examined conflicts of interest between middle- and upper-class allies of the strikers and those who saw the strike as an opportunity to organize for Socialism. Feminist historians of the strike have also raised the important question of the power differential between men and women in the garment unions. Men's power in the labor movement, rooted in domination both of higher-paid jobs and unions' executive boards, strongly affected the choices made by women workers during and after the strike. It also shaped much subsequent analysis of the strike and of women's labor organizing in general. See Tax, *Rising of the Women*; Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*; Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, Unionism, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: New American Library, 1977); Joan Jensen and Sue Davidson eds., *A Needle, a Bobbin, and a Strike* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

8. Boone, *Women's Trade Union Leagues*, 112–14.
9. Sumner, "Spirit of the Strikers."
10. NYWTUL Secretary's Report, September 15, 1909, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.
11. Clara Lemlich, "The Inside of a Shirtwaist Factory: An Appeal to Women Who Wear Choice and Beautiful Clothing," *Good Housekeeping* 54, no. 3 (March 1912): 367–69.
12. Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 150–51.
13. Sumner, "Spirit of the Strikers"; Rose Schneiderman and Leonora O'Reilly,

"Report to the NYWTUL Executive Board, October 20, 1909," Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers; *New York Call*, November 13–19, 30, December 4–8, 29, 1909; Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 149–54.

14. Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 151; Sumner, "Spirit of the Strikers."

15. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, October 20, 1909, and Report to the Executive Board, October 20, 1909, both in Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.

16. Clara Lemlich Shavelson, "Remembering the Waistmakers General Strike, 1909," *Jewish Currents*, November 1982. *New York Call*, November 23, 1909.

17. *New York Call*, November 27, 1909.

18. Minutes of Special Meeting of the NYWTUL Executive Board, November 13, 1909, and Secretary's Report, November 17, 1909, both in Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers; *New York Call*, November 13, 1909; Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 153; Clara Lemlich Shavelson, interview by Martha and Joel Schaffer, Los Angeles, Calif., February 2, 1974.

19. *New York Call*, November 23, 24, 25, 27, December 3, 1909; postcard, n.d. (content indicates that it was written right after the strike's end), in the possession of Martha Schaffer.

20. *New York Call*, November 30, December 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 29, 1909.

21. *Ibid.*, December 5, 7, 8, 1909.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *New York Call*, December 29, 1909. For detailed day-to-day coverage of arrests and skirmishes at different shops, see the *New York Times*, November 5, 6, and 14, 1909, and just about daily from November 23, 1909, through January 18, 1910. Coverage then continued intermittently through February 11, 1910.

24. Minutes of the NYWTUL Membership Meeting, April 20, June 15, 1910, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.

25. See Tax, *Rising of the Women*, 230–40. Tax discusses the undemocratic structure of the union and the ways that the union-appointed arbitrators undermined the women workers' control over the strike.

26. See letters between Pauline Newman and Rose Schneiderman, 1909–14, File 18A, Rose Schneiderman Collection, Tamiment Institute Library, New York University (hereafter cited as Schneiderman Papers); see also articles by Pauline Newman in the WTUL publication *Life and Labor* and in *Progressive Woman*, *Socialist Woman*, and the *Ladies' Garment Worker*, 1910–14.

27. See Pauline Newman, interview by Barbara Wertheimer, New York, N.Y., November 1976; Newman-Schneiderman letters, File 18A, Schneiderman Papers; Michael Owen, telephone interview by author, September 27, 1992; Leon Stein, interview by author, Cranbury, N.J., October 19, 1988.

28. Pauline Newman to Rose Schneiderman, April 2, 21, 1910.

29. PMN to RS, August 17, September 13, 1910.

30. PMN to RS, September 20, October 19, 1910, June 27, 1911.

31. *New York Call*, March 28, 1911.

32. *New York Times*, April 3, 1911.

33. PMN to RS, March 28, April n.d., April 12, 17, 1911.

34. PMN to RS, April 12, 17, 1911.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Newman, interview by Wertheimer; Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, February 15, 1911, NYWTUL Papers; Helen Marot, "A Woman's Strike—An Appreciation of the Shirtwaist Makers of New York," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science of the City of New York*, October 1910.

37. Secretary's Report to the NYWTUL Executive Board, Secretary's Report, February 15, April 27, September 10 (?), 1911, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.

38. *Ibid.*; Pauline Newman, interview by author, New York, N.Y., February 9, 1984.

39. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, June 22, 1911, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers.

40. PMN to RS, August 9, 1911; Newman, "From the Battlefield."

41. *Ibid.*

42. Newman, "From the Battlefield."

43. PMN to RS, October 2, November 7, 14, December 1, 1911.

44. PMN to RS, n.d. (but, from content, likely to be fall 1911), November 9, 21, December 26, 1911, January 16, 1912.

45. PMN to RS, January 16, 1912.

46. PMN to RS, February 22, January 16, 1912.

47. PMN to RS, November 9, 1911, January 16, 1912.

48. PMN to RS, November 21, December 26, 1911.

49. PMN to RS, February 9, 1912.

50. PMN to RS, February 22, 1912.

51. PMN to RS, n.d. (probably fall 1911).

52. PMN to RS, February 22, 1912, Newman Papers. The most complete analysis of the strike can be found in Mason, "Feeling the Pinch."

53. PMN to RS, March 5, April 14, July 11, 1912, Schneiderman Papers.

54. Josephine Casey, "Letter from Prison," *Detroit Times*, May 4, 1912, reprinted in *Out of the Sweatshop*, ed. Leon Stein (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1977), 129–31.

55. See Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 50–51. See also Sarah Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 99–101, for her analysis of Victorian literature about work and female respectability. The quote is from Mary A. Laselle and Katherine E. Wiley, *Vocations for Girls* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 32, cited in Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread*, 100.

56. Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 51. The cigar maker Peiss quotes testified before the New York State Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1885. Peiss also cites literature from the first and second decades of the twentieth century dealing with the same problem.

57. Leonora O'Reilly, *Life and Labor*, July 1912; Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 221–22; Pauline M. Newman, "Letters to Hugh and Michael" (1915–69), Box 1, Newman Papers; PMN to RS, April 4, June 9, July 11, 1912, Schneiderman Papers.

58. PMN to RS, July 11, 1912.

59. See Karen Mason, "Feeling the Pinch."

60. PMN to RS, February 22, March 5, 1912.

61. See PMN to RS, February 9, 1912; *Ladies' Garment Worker*, 1914–18; Newman, interview by author.

62. There is a good deal of material on the women's trades strike of 1913. See

Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 218–32; Rose Schneiderman, *All for One* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1967), 104–10; Newman, “White Goods Workers’ Strike”; *New York Times*, May 27, 1911; January 2, 6, 8–16, 18–20, 22, 29, 1913.

63. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, February 15, April 27, May 13, 25, 1913, Reel 2, NYWTUL Papers.

64. *New York Times*, January 6, 1913.

65. See Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 225–26; see also Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, February 15, April 27, May 13, 25, 1913, Reel 2, NYWTUL Papers.

66. *New York Times*, January 19, 20, 1913.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.* See also Baum, Hyman, and Michel, *Jewish Woman in America*, 146–48.

69. Newman, “White Goods Workers’ Strike”; *New York Times*, January 9, 10, 1913.

70. *New York Times*, January 14, 16, 1913.

71. *Ibid.*, January 29, 30, 1913.

72. *Ibid.*, January 14, 16, 1913.

73. *Ibid.*, January 18, 1913.

74. *Ibid.*, January 18, 22, 1913.

75. *Ibid.*, January 22, 1913.

76. Newman, “White Goods Workers Strike.”

77. *Ibid.*

78. FMC to Florence Miller, April 16, 1928, Box 4, Cohn Papers.

79. *Chicago Day Book*, cited in Carsel, *A History of the Chicago Ladies' Garment Workers' Union*.

80. See Cohen, “Fannia Cohn,” 96–99. Cohen’s January 10, 1974 interview with Mary Goff is cited on p. 97. See also FMC to “Dear Friend,” n.d., Box 5, Cohn Papers.

CHAPTER 3

1. Fannie Zinsher to Morris Schappes, February 29, 1948, *Jewish Currents*, September 1975.

2. *New York Evening Journal*, July 14, 1907.

3. Extracts from Address Delivered by Miss Rose Schneiderman before the Women’s Industrial Conference, January 20, 1926, Papers of the U.S. Women’s Bureau, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. (hereafter cited as U.S. Women’s Bureau Papers).

4. See Ellen Carol Dubois, “Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894–1909,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 34–58.

5. Fannia Cohn, “Vote for Woman Suffrage” and “Complete Equality between Men and Women,” *Ladies' Garment Worker*, November and December 1917.

6. Olympia Brown, speech to the 1899 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, quoted in Aileen Kraditor, ed., *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 257–59.

For further examples of racist and anti-immigrant suffrage justifications see Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal*, 252–65. As Kraditor’s selection of documents illustrates, racist and xenophobic justifications for suffrage were not restricted to regional groups but

were also incorporated into the literature of the National American Woman Suffrage Association before the turn of the century.

7. Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal*. See also Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880–1917* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 168–69.

8. Proceedings of the Second Biennial National WTUL Convention, 1909, WTUL Papers, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass. (hereafter cited as WTUL Papers). Given that these comments were made at an all-women’s gathering, the gender of Schneiderman’s language is interesting.

9. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, April 20, 1910, Reel 1, NYWTUL Papers. In *Rising of the Women*, 223–27, Meredith Tax offers one of the only analyses I’ve found of racial relations among black and white women in the early-twentieth-century garment trades. For information on Schneiderman’s later attempts to organize black women workers, see NYWTUL Annual Reports, 1921–38, Reels 2, 3, and 4, NYWTUL Papers.

10. Clara Lemlich, “The Inside of a Shirtwaist Factory,” *Good Housekeeping* 54 (March 1912): 369.

11. Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 172–79, 191–220, and Blewett, *We Will Rise in Our Might: Workingwomen's Voices from Nineteenth-Century New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 122–39. Blewett traces the ambivalent relationship between women shoe workers and middle-class suffragists/reformers in post-Civil War New England and the debate over woman suffrage among late-nineteenth-century trade unionists.

12. See Dubois, “Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance”; Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (New York: Norton, 1965); Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal*; William O’Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

13. “Florence Kelley on Working Girls,” address to the Second Annual Convention of the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association; see also “Working Woman’s Need of the Ballot,” speech delivered to the 1898 National American Woman Suffrage Association convention, both in Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal*, 273–76. See also Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*. On p. 139 (text and n. 22), Kraditor quotes several of Kelley’s less enlightened comments on immigrant working women.

14. Lemlich, “Inside of a Shirtwaist Factory”; Pauline Newman, interview by author, New York, N.Y., February 9, 1984.

15. Newman, interview by author; Pauline Newman, interview by Barbara Wertheimer, New York, N.Y., November 1976.

16. See Dubois, “Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance.”

17. *Ibid.* See also Tax, *Rising of the Women*, 170.

18. Dubois, “Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance.” See also Tax, *Rising of the Women*, 169–71, and “Miss Rose Schneiderman, Gifted Young Lecturer,” leaflet of the American Suffragettes, n.d., Reel 2, Schneiderman Papers.

19. *Socialist Woman*, May 1908.

20. Dubois, “Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance.” See also Frances Squire Potter to RS, April 24, 1910, and Harriot Stanton Blatch to RS, May 2, 1910, Reel 1, Schneiderman Papers.

21. *New York Call*, November 18, 1909.
22. See *New York Call* "Women's Page" November through December 1909, particularly November 18 and 19 and December 6, 13, 14, and 20. Though there is no record of how she voted, Newman's role in organizing the December 1909 conference was noted in the introduction to her May 2, 1914 article on Socialist suffragism for the *New York Call*. Block quote is from Tax, *Rising of the Women*, 191.
23. Minutes of the Wage Earners' League for Woman Suffrage, March 22, 1911, O'Reilly Papers. In *Rising of the Women*, 171-78, Meredith Tax offers one of the only commentaries on the emergence of the Wage Earners' League.
24. Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 233-34.
25. Jessie Ashley, "Relation of Suffragism to Working-Class Women," *Women's Journal*, June 24, 1911, excerpted in Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal*, 278-82.
26. Paula Scheier, "Clara Lemlich Shavelson: Fifty Years in Labor's Front Line," *Jewish Life*, November 1954.
27. Mary Beard to Leonora O'Reilly, January 1, 1912, cited in Tax, *Rising of the Women*, 177.
28. Beard to O'Reilly, July 21, 1912, cited in Tax, *Rising of the Women*, 177-78.
29. Martha Schaffer, telephone interview by author, March 11, 1989.
30. Newman, interview by Wertheimer; Scheier, "Clara Lemlich Shavelson."
31. Max Fruchter to Rose Schneiderman, March 5, 1911, Reel 1, Schneiderman Papers.
32. Rose Schneiderman, *All for One* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1967), 121-22.
33. Minutes of the Wage Earners' League for Woman Suffrage, March 22, 1911, O'Reilly Papers.
34. "Bill for Suffrage Week," n.d., O'Reilly Papers.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Newman recalled the vividness and dramatic power of O'Reilly's speaking style (Newman, interview by author); Constance D. Leupp commented on Lemlich's speaking style in her article "30,000 Girls Strike in New York City," *The Survey*, December 18, 1909.
37. "Senators vs. Working Women" (handbill of the Wage Earners' League for Woman Suffrage), Reel 12, O'Reilly Papers.
38. All quotes from this meeting were taken from a Wage Earners' League pamphlet called *Senators vs. Working Women* that contains full versions of all the "commonsense" answers to specific state senators' arguments. This pamphlet became the most popular of the league's publications. In the Wage Earners' League for Woman Suffrage collection, a subset of the O'Reilly Papers.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. Transcript of Clara Lemlich's speech, April 22, 1912, in *ibid.*
43. "Senators vs. Working Women" (handbill for the April 22 meeting) and *Senators vs. Working Women* (pamphlet), both by the Wage Earners' League for Woman Suffrage, O'Reilly Papers.
44. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 121-23; PMN to RS, July 26, 1912, Schneiderman Papers.

45. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 121-23; M. Sherwood to Harriet Taylor Upton, July 15, 1912, Reel 1, Schneiderman Papers.
46. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 121-23; Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, Unionism, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 122-39.
47. *New York Call*, May 2, 1914.
48. Newman, interview by Wertheimer.
49. PMN to RS, n.d., File 18A, Schneiderman Papers.
50. PMN to RS, n.d., File 18A, Schneiderman Papers; Mary Beard to Leonora O'Reilly, July 21, 1912, O'Reilly Papers. O'Reilly returned to the helm of the Industrial Section in 1915.
51. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, December 29, 1914, Reel 2, NYWTUL Papers.
52. *The Message*, December 25, 1914.
53. Pauline Newman, *New York Call*, May 2, 1914.
54. Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 234-35.
55. Minutes of the NYWTUL Executive Board, July 12, 1915, Reel 2, NYWTUL Papers.
56. *Ibid.*; *ibid.*, November 19, 1915, Reel 2, NYWTUL Papers; Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters*, 136-38.
57. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 110-17; RS to PMN, February 6, 1916, and August 6, 1917, Newman Papers. RS to Benjamin Schlesinger, February 6, 1916, and to Abe Baroff, December 1, 1916, Reel 1, Schneiderman Papers.
58. Fannia Cohn, "Vote for Woman Suffrage" and "Complete Equality between Men and Women," *Ladies' Garment Worker*, November and December 1917.
59. Cohn, "Vote for Woman Suffrage."
60. "Suffrage Correspondence Course," Suffrage Papers, Reel 12, O'Reilly Papers.
61. "Letter Series," Suffrage Papers, Reel 12, O'Reilly Papers.
62. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 124-25.
63. "For Congress, 18th Congressional District, Vote for Pauline Newman" (campaign handbill and poster), and Newman, "Fragments toward an Autobiography, October 11, 1958," both in Box 9, Newman Papers; Newman, interview by Wertheimer; *New York Times*, July 12, 1929.
64. Rose Schneiderman, "WTUL Legislative Efforts" (typescript for a radio speech), June 1955, Reel 2, Schneiderman Papers. See also Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). On p. 105, Cott notes that the way women voted varied from region to region, but there is some evidence that women tended to improve the chances of radical parties and candidates in New York.
65. Schneiderman, "WTUL Legislative Efforts."
66. *New York Times*, May 31, 1920; Schneiderman, *All for One*, 146-48.
67. Schneiderman, *All for One*, 146-48.
68. *Ibid.*, 130-33; *New York Times*, March 7, 1919.
69. *New York Times*, May 31, 1920; RS to Margaret Dreier Robins, March 10, 1919, Reel 1, Schneiderman Papers; Schneiderman, *All for One*, 146-48; Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 65.
70. See Roslyn Terborg-Penn, "Discontented Black Feminists," in *Decades of Discontent*, ed. Joan Jensen and Lois Scharf (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); see also Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*.

71. *New York Times*, May 30, 1920; Frank Crosswaith to RS, April 7, 1949, Schneiderman Papers; WTUL Biennial Convention Proceedings, 1909–29, WTUL Papers; NYWTUL Annual Reports, 1922–40 and 1944–49, NYWTUL Papers. Speech before Harlem Labor Committee, 1939, Box 9, Cohn Papers; correspondence with A. Philip Randolph, Boxes 3–5, Cohn Papers.

CHAPTER 4

1. See Dee Ann Montgomery, “Miller, Frieda Segelke”; Elizabeth Payne Moore, “Dreier, Mary”; Charles H. Trout, “Perkins, Frances”; and Edward T. James, “Anderson, Mary,” all in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, ed. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980). See also David Brody, “Swartz, Maud O’Farrel,” in *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 3:413–15. There are, of course, many sources on Eleanor Roosevelt. This account draws most heavily from two: Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin* (New York: Signet, 1971), and Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume One, 1884–1933* (New York: Viking, 1992).

2. Rose Schneiderman, “Women’s Role in Labor Legislation,” n.d., Reel 2, Schneiderman Papers.

3. See Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women’s Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 140–61, and Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 205–14, for somewhat different interpretations of the NYWTUL and the early years of its legislative activity.

There is a burgeoning literature on middle-class women’s activism and the development of the early-twentieth-century American welfare state. Much of this scholarship is concerned with the way that the arguments for and the conceptualization of the state’s responsibilities to dependent women and children reinforced a gendered conception of citizenship that limited American women’s political power after they got the vote. See *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States*, ed. Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988); and Carole Pateman, “The Patriarchal Welfare State,” in *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 231–61. For an overview of the new scholarship see Linda Gordon, “The New Feminist Scholarship on the Welfare State,” in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 9–35.

Of particular relevance to the analysis offered in this chapter is Gwendolyn Mink, “The Lady and the Tramp: Gender, Race and the Origins of the American Welfare State,” in Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*, 92–123. Mink argues that the early-twentieth-century U.S. welfare state can be distinguished from its European counterparts in that the European governments’ social policies were targeted at a basically gender-neutral worker-citizen while U.S. policies were targeted at a citizen-mother. She points to a persistence of the idea of republican motherhood posited by Linda Kerber—the notion that “motherhood . . . held the key to vigor in the citizenry”—and

argues that middle-class reformers played both on that linkage and on fear of unasimilable new immigrant groups to create a consensus for social welfare programs that “socialized motherhood.” Mink concludes that “the gender-biased social welfare innovations of the pre–New Deal period tackled problems of poverty through a focus on dependent motherhood and sought solutions to dilemmas of ethnic and racial diversity in the regulation of motherhood” (114).

4. Gordon, “New Feminist Scholarship.”

5. As Linda Gordon has noted, working-class women “actually gained . . . power from it, because they could use different systems against each other—for example, the welfare system against domestic male supremacy.” *Ibid.*, p. 16. Carole Pateman makes similar points in “The Patriarchal Welfare State.”

6. See Mink, “Lady and the Tramp”; Virginia Sapiro, “The Gender Basis of American Social Policy”; Gordon, “New Feminist Scholarship”; and Barbara J. Nelson, “The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State,” all in Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*.

7. Diane Kirkby, “The Wage-Earning Woman and the State: The National Women’s Trade Union League and Protective Labor Legislation, 1903–1923,” *Labor History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 54–74. See also NYWTUL Annual Reports, 1917–55, Reels 2, 3, 4, NYWTUL Papers.

8. Mink, “Lady and the Tramp.”

9. The literature on the NWP and the struggle over an Equal Rights Amendment is voluminous. The sources consulted for the ERA section of this chapter include the NYWTUL Papers, 1921–49 (Reels 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12); Elizabeth Faulkner Baker, *Protective Labor Legislation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925); J. Stanley Lemons, *The Woman Citizen* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Philip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement* (New York: Free Press, 1980); and Sybil Lipschultz, “Mischievous Equality: Women, Protection, and Equal Rights,” paper presented at the NYU Comparative Social History Colloquium, October 30, 1986.

10. In *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880–1917* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), Meredith Tax argues, correctly, that “the women who built the WTUL . . . made it possible for women to do trade union organizing as a career, but with this possibility came careerism. Thus, along with the development of trade unionism among women to the point where it could sustain professional organizers, came the development of the woman labor leader—never a complete equal in the labor aristocracy because she was a woman, but nevertheless able to find her place in its ranks” (122).

That accurately describes the career trajectories of Schneiderman and Newman. But while Tax sees the conservative influence of the AFL as the determining force behind this development, I believe that the involvement of relatively powerful middle- and upper-class women in the League was what cemented their status as “women labor leaders.”

11. Alice Kessler-Harris has examined some of the ways in which Schneiderman’s recasting of her image in the 1930s diminished her effectiveness as a labor leader. See Kessler-Harris, “Rose Schneiderman,” in *American Labor Leaders*, ed. Warren Van Tine and Melvyn Dubofsky (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). In his Ph.D.