

# **Working-class women's agency in the labour movement in East London, 1840-1914**

**Dianne Shepherd**

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## **Abstract**

This research reveals a hidden history of working-class women's lives and agency in industrial East London, 1840 to 1914. "Sweated" industrial women were integral to East London's industrial labour geographies, as demonstrated in the specific trades of bookbinding, upholstery, garment making and tailoring, confectionery and ropemaking, amongst others. Women were ideologically restricted into the sphere of domesticity, which limited their equal access to the labour force and disavowed their public voice. Working-class women developed resilience and feminist resistance to their class exploitation through their local labour geographies. As women learned from the previous generations' resistance, they created and developed conduits of self-expression within the labour movements' platforms. As middle-class women joined working-class women in the labour force, they intersected in a labour movement in which class both differentiated and consolidated people. A prosopography shows that working-class women workers' public manifestation of agency was through trade unionism. Between 1840 and 1914, working-class women's self-expression grew louder. This thesis examines agency through a framework of four pillars of volition, materialist, political and corporeal agency. As working-class women claimed their right to the public sphere, they developed their feminist citizenship from below.

## Acknowledgements

Dickens wrote in 1840 that the 'poor were seldom allowed to talk for themselves' and 'what the poor are to the poor is little known', and this has continued.<sup>1</sup> I hope that this research will help redress this balance.

Many thanks to Dr Katrina Navickas and Professor Sarah Lloyd for their words of wisdom and support in guiding this PhD to its completion.

This thesis could only have been written with the support and patience of John and Oliver and so it is dedicated to them. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 6.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores working-class women's agency within the labour movement, in the context of East London's expanding socio-economic and political landscape, from 1840 to 1914. Although wretched in its poverty, by the 1840s, East London had become the workshop of the metropolis.<sup>2</sup> It attracted influxes of impecunious immigrants and migrants, many of whom were women, seeking new lives and employment.<sup>3</sup> By 1891, although still wretched, East London had become, as Arthur Morrison wrote in a vignette published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, 'a vast city, as famous in its way as any the hand of man has made'.<sup>4</sup> Women's hands were significantly integral to its creation and fame. To take advantage of East London's largely unskilled, labour force, capitalists divided manufacturing into individual industrial processes. Even children undertook industrial work. Competition for work enabled employers to maximize their profits by undercutting wages and 'sweating' their employees in arduous, unsanitary and low-paid working conditions.<sup>5</sup> Journalist Henry Mayhew found an abundance of women and girls working in multitudes of sweated trades and industries in homes, streets, workshops and factories.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1840 and 1914, an increasing number of middle-class women sought waged work in London's expanding labour market. Many were forced to work

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<sup>2</sup> "Distress," *The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (Leeds, England), 209, Saturday November 13 1841.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry White, *London in the nineteenth century: 'a human awful wonder of God'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 3; John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: a history of East London* (New Haven, C.T.; London: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Emma Francis and Nadia Valman, "Introduction: revisiting the Victorian East End," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 13 (2011): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jenny Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation* (Aldershot: Hants, England; Brookfield, V.T: Gower, 1986), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 9; Helen Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," *Victorian Studies* 40, no. 4 (1997): 589-629 (597-603).

in the same sweated conditions as East London's poorest workers. Sweated female labour, being the most exploitative, was the cheapest, and, to the resentment of antagonistic male workers, was used to set the wage standard. To gain control over their working lives, desperate workers resorted to mobilising their agency through democratic and labour movements. As middle-class women increasingly joined the industrial labour market, middle-class activists created platforms which became part of the broad labour movement. To protect their wealth and class privilege, wealthy employers and the state invalidated workers' voices as uncivil outcasts responsible for their own wretchedness.<sup>7</sup> As workers' identities were increasingly reshaped into an exploitative class positionality of lowness, the experience impacted upon their selfhoods and drove their volition to create change. At times, workers' solidarity bridged cultural, gender, physical and class differences, forming a consolidated heterogeneous class of resistance. At other times, these differences reappeared, fracturing solidarity.

The labour movement's leadership was largely composed of men and middle-class women. Although the movement depended upon working-class women's agency, many of its leaders limited working-class women's involvement and agency to speak for themselves. Despite these constraints, working-class women created conduits within the movements' platforms to resist gendered inequality and sweated industrial exploitation. As working-class women's political agency was most transparent through trade unionism, this prosopography follows the agency and influence of an intergenerational network of working-class women trade union secretaries. It reveals how the secretaries and women workers evolved their agency through the four pillars of volition, materialist, political and corporeal agency in East London. As women workers politicized the labour geographies in which they lived and worked, they evolved their feminist citizenship from below in demands for political and social change.

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<sup>7</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 15-65; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2013): 23, 32.

## Methodology

This prosopography identifies the formative process of working-class women's agency in the labour movement in East London, 1840-1914. It follows the political lives of nine working-class trade union secretaries, who created alliances and networks through the broad labour movement's platforms. It is a history of resistance that is so delineated by class and gender that it requires an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. Such a framing of the primary source evidence permits the historian to interpret, explain, predict, understand, and even test, phenomena. As Gail Letherby states, 'the history of resistance is long, resistance is practical and political, as well as academic and intellectual'.<sup>8</sup> This history of resistance is shaped by Claire Annesley's view that agency is the 'conscious capacity to choose to act at a personal and political level', to 'intervene in the world' and 'to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs'.<sup>9</sup> This definition suggests that an individual, of their own volition, enacts activism and organization to resist the imposed institutional and social constraints that allow society to ignore, disadvantage, marginalize and penalize them.<sup>10</sup> Writing of gendered exploitative labour in the 1840s, Ruth and Edmund Frow, Julia Swindell, Malcolm Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett identify how exploitative labour was the catalyst for women's political activism.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that the experience of 'the making of the economic geography of capitalism through the eyes of labour' stimulates and orientates workers' activism and organization.<sup>12</sup> It is in this light that historical evidence shows that the formative process of working-

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<sup>8</sup> Gayle Letherby, *Feminist research in theory and practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Claire Annesley, "Women's political agency and welfare reform engendering the adult worker model," *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 3 (2007): 452-466 (452).

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Lee and Anne Logan, "Women's agency, activism and organisation," *Women's History Review* 28, no. 6 (2019): 831-834 (831 abstract).

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Frow and Edmund Frow, eds., *Political women 1800-1850* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), vii-xiv; Malcolm Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in protest 1800-1850* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 9-27.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labour and Working Class History* 64 (Fall 2003): 112-138 (113 abstract); Noel Castree, "Labour geography: a work in progress", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Studies* 31, no. 4 (December 2007): 853-862 (1).

class women's agency evolved through the four pillars of volition, materialist, political and corporeal agency.

Between the years 1840 and 1914, East London became an important site for working-class women's agency. From the moment women arrived seeking work they became immersed in East London's labour force. As women workers embedded themselves in their local geographies, they developed agency based on resistance and survival, which relied upon social ties and obligations.<sup>13</sup> As women became politicized through experience, they became part of the reshaping of East London's political landscape from below.<sup>14</sup> This research makes use of the maps created as part of Charles Booth's inquiry, the *Life and Labour of the People* (1889). The maps show how East London's human and non-human landscape developed. Booth interpreted workers' lives in East London through a series of investigations. The inquiry's poverty series investigated people 'as they lived street by street, family by family in their homes'. Its industry series identified the industries and trades that burgeoned as East London became the British Empire's metropole's workshop.<sup>15</sup>

Booth defined East London's 'inner ring' as Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, St George's in the East, Wapping, Shadwell, Ratcliff and the western portions of Mile End. By 1903, he had redefined Bethnal Green as part of 'outer East London', which also included Stepney and Poplar. Given outer East London's 'industrial nature', Booth defined it as the 'true East End of London'.<sup>16</sup> Booth's maps of East London, as seen in the Figures 1 and 2 below, show that, by 1900, East

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labour and Working Class History* 64 (Fall 2003): 112-138 (113 abstract); Noel Castree, "Labour geography: a work in progress," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Studies* 31, no. 4 (December 2007): 853-862 (1).

<sup>14</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labour and Working Class History* 64 (Fall 2003): 112-138 (113 abstract); Noel Castree, "Labour geography: a work in progress," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Studies* 31, no. 4 (December 2007): 853-862 (1).

<sup>15</sup> Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London*, vol. IV (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902); "Charles Booth's London: poverty maps and notebooks", accessed October 15 2018, <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>.

<sup>16</sup> Jerry White, *London in the nineteenth century: 'a human awful wonder of God'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 5.

London was an intensively populated industrial area. The maps indicate that large sways of people from different socio-economic backgrounds lived in close proximity to each other.<sup>17</sup> Laura Vaughan's analysis of Booth's maps reveals that some workers were more 'spatially segregated' from the more 'prosperous integrated' streets near the economic epicentres of the thoroughfares.<sup>18</sup>

As workers became politicized by their industrial experience, their agency developed spatially. Their closeness to each other and to the economic epicentres became the cornerstone of both their political and survival agency. Their proximity to the state power held in the Houses of Parliament became the cornerstone of the labour movement. This spatial agency made East London's labour movement relevant to workers' agency across the country and even across the world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London*, vol. IV (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902).

<sup>18</sup> Laura Vaughan, "The spatial form of poverty in Charles Booth's London," ed. Laura Vaughan, *The spatial syntax of urban segregation* (London: UCL, 2007), 235; Laura Vaughan, "Mapping the East End 'Labyrinth'," in *Jack the Ripper and the East End Labyrinth* (London: Random House, 2008), Introduction.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labour and Working Class History* 64 (Fall 2003): 112-138 (113 abstract); Colin McFarlane, "The city as assemblage: dwelling and urban space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011) 649-71 (651, 654).

MAP DESCRIPTIVE OF LONDON POVERTY, 1898-9  
(IN 12 SHEETS)

SHEET 5.  
EAST CENTRAL DISTRICT



Figure 1: Charles Booth's map of the East Central District of London, which is represented in the coloured area. It includes Bethnal Green in the north, Spitalfields in the central area and Whitechapel in the south-west

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)



**Figure 2: Charles Booth's map of the Eastern District of London, which includes the parishes of Stepney, Poplar, Ratcliffe and Limehouse with the Docks, Wapping, in the south**

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

Key:

Class A: Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.

Black



Class B: Very poor, casual. Chronic want.

Dark blue



Class C: Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family.

Light blue



Class D: Mixed. Some comfortable; others poor.

Purple



Class E: Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.

Pink



Class F: Middle class. Well-to-do.

Red



Class G: Upper-middle and upper classes. Wealthy.

Yellow



## Outcast London

Given the premise that experience is the catalyst for agency, Gareth Stedman Jones' classic work, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society* (1971) is relevant as it details the constructs of workers' experience in his panorama of metropole industrial East London. As new raw materials and products arrived via East London's port, workers recognized potential new trades and employment opportunities. Despite the wealth that workers produced, most only earned sweated wages, which, as Booth's maps indicate, defined their lower class status. Stedman Jones' work references Rev. Andrew Mearns, *The bitter cry of outcast London: an inquiry into the condition of the abject poor* (1883), which highlighted that

East London's sweated workers were outcast from society.<sup>20</sup> Stedman Jones also recognizes that the class structure ensured that the 'outcast' poor's 'bitter cry' was not heard in capitalist Victorian society. Historian of philosophy, Peter D. Thomas, clarifies the functioning of the Victorian state through Gayatri Spivak's Gramscian ideas of Indians' colonial positionality. Spivak suggests that bourgeois civil and political societies formed an "integral State" which operated to protect state power and class privilege.<sup>21</sup> As the societies enclosed workers in oppressive and disenfranchising conditions, they distorted workers' identities, such as their gender, ethnicity, disability, age and poverty into 'lowness'. Their lowness reflected their positionality of limited power and vulnerability to sweated exploitation. As their labour geographies became stigmatized "ghettos", their communities became disavowed of the right to be heard.<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Nash et al and Angela Martinez et al term these multiple distorted categories as 'geometrics of oppression'.<sup>23</sup>

Discussions of the geometrics of women's oppression can be found in the work of Clare Midgley, who tracks the migration of English, Irish, Jewish, Indian and Black women through the British Empire. Irish and Jewish incomers created large communities in East London.<sup>24</sup> As women workers were forced into sweated labour, including prostitution, East London became part of an intriguing and fearful 'city of

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Mearns, *The bitter cry of outcast London: an inquiry in the condition of the abject poor* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1883).

<sup>21</sup> Peter D. Thomas, "Refiguring the subaltern," *Political Theory* 4 (2018): 1-24 (4).

<sup>22</sup> Laura Vaughan, "The spatial form of poverty in Charles Booth's London," ed. Laura Vaughan, *The spatial syntax of urban segregation* (London: UCL, 2007), 235; Laura Vaughan, "Mapping the East End 'Labyrinth'," in *Jack the Ripper and the East End Labyrinth* (London: Random House, 2008), Introduction.

<sup>23</sup> Luis Sánchez, "Positionality," in *Encyclopedia of Geography*, ed. Barney Warf (Sage, 2010), accessed April 2 2019, <https://sk.sagepub.com/reference/geography>; Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1-15; Jennifer C. Nash, "Intersectionality and its discontents," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2017): 117-129 (123); Angela Martinez, Lee Martin and Susan Marlow, "Developing a critical realist positional approach to intersectionality," *Journal of Critical Realism* 13, no. 5 (2014): 447-466 (448); Neil M Coe and David C. Jordhus-Lier, "Constrained agency? Re-evaluating the geographies of labour," *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 2 (2010): 211-233 (215).

<sup>24</sup> Clare Midgley, "Ethnicity, 'race' and empire," in *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945. An introduction*, ed. June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), chap. 10.

dreadful delight'.<sup>25</sup> Anne McIntoch and Bronwen Walters suggest that this gendered spatial idea of fear intersected with distortions of class and race. It piqued middle-class journalists' and social investigators' interest as they slumped in this 'anarchic, distant outpost of the empire peopled by violent and primitive races'.<sup>26</sup> 'Slummer' social workers cemented Mearns' ideas of outcast London in their journal *Eastward Ho*.<sup>27</sup> Phyllis Lassner and Mia Spiro critique modern anti-semitic English society through Virginia Woolfe's portrayal of "Gothic" Jewish labour geographies in East London. Woolfe's work provides a 'tool to negotiate the borders of Englishness and political and economic oppression'.<sup>28</sup> George Arkell, who helped map Booth's survey, mapped the Jewish community in East London (see Figure3 below).<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, "Review of Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest," by Anne McClintock, *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (February 1998): 183-184; Bronwen Walter, "Whiteness and diasporic Irishness: nation, gender and class," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 9 (2011): 1295-1312 (1295-1296); Bronwen Walter, "Strangers on the inside: Irish women servants in England, 1881," *Immigrants and Minorities* 27, nos. 2/3 (2009): 279-99 (287).

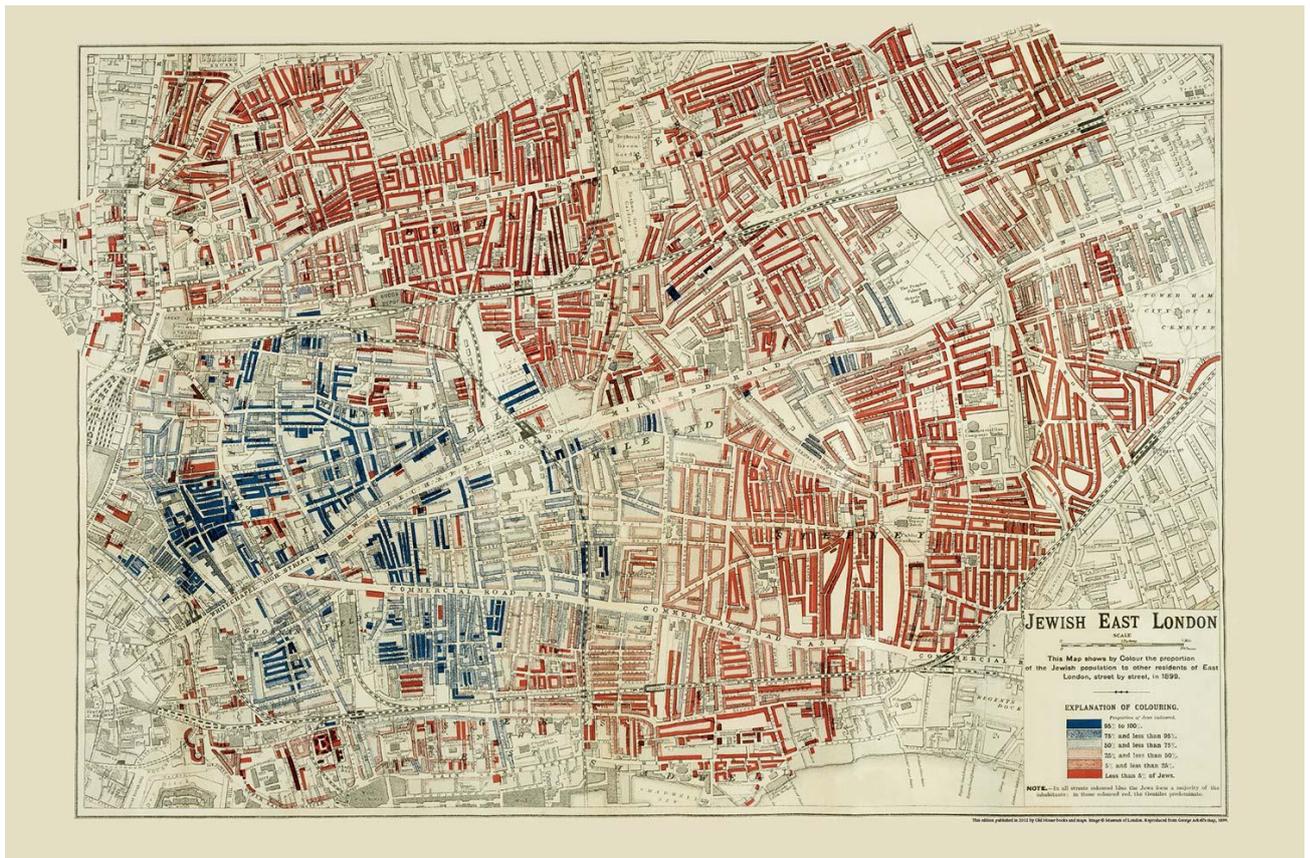
<sup>26</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, "Review of Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest," by Anne McClintock, *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (February 1998): 183-184; Bronwen Walter, "Whiteness and diasporic Irishness: nation, gender and class," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 9 (2011): 1295-1312 (1295-1296); Bronwen Walter, "Strangers on the inside: Irish women servants in England, 1881," *Immigrants and Minorities* 27, nos. 2/3 (2009): 279-99 (287); Seth Koven, *Slumming: sexual and social politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Geoff Ginn, "Answering the 'Bitter Cry': urban description and social reform in the late-Victorian East End," *The London Journal* 31, no. 2 (2006): 179-200 (179-180).

<sup>28</sup> Phyllis Lassner and Mia Spiro, "A tale of two cities: Virginia Woolfe's imagined Jewish spaces and London's East End Jewish Culture," *Woolf Studies Annual* 19 (2013): 64.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Russell and H.S. Lewis, *The Jew in London: a study of racial character and present-day conditions; being two essays prepared for the Toynbee trustees* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900)

work indicates the level of racialization of East London.



**Figure 3: Map of Jewish East London 1900**

(Source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/jewish-east-london>)

Key indicating Jewish population:

Royal Blue: 95%–100%

Mottled dark blue: 75%-95%

Mottled pale blue: 50%-75%

Mottled dark pink: 25%–50%

Mottled pale pink: 25%–5%

Red: Less than 5%

Stedman Jones' work, as detailed as it is, does not distinguish between the gendered industrial experiences of men and women. Sally Alexander notes that, by the 1860s, the dilution of industrial processes enabled capitalists and employers to take advantage of cheaper unskilled female labour. Women workers' lower wages

set the wage standard, and this was still the case in 1914.<sup>30</sup> Working-class women learned to survive on their pitiful wages through an 'economy of makeshifts'. They 'eked out' and lived on whatever means they could, including charity.<sup>31</sup> L. Orr et al's useful 'livelihoods approach' measures access to different assets, which push the poor into a category of no choice (survival), limited choice (coping), more choice (adapting), or to a full range of choices (accumulating).<sup>32</sup> Ruth Lister suggests that, while the poor mostly live with the continuous tactical regime of managing, juggling or coping, they do not necessarily seek to subvert or challenge their social or economic constraints. It is only when they have no choice that they resort to subversion and protest.<sup>33</sup>

### **Reflections of class versus sex in the labour movement**

In 1914, Mabel Atkinson noted that there were two women's movements. In one movement middle-class women rebelled against sex-exclusion and demanded rights to education, participation in government and a livelihood. In the other movement proletariat women, who worked too long at monotonous work recognised their capitalist exploitation and felt solidarity with their male counterpart.<sup>34</sup> Analysing East London's broad labour movement that was both inclusive of, and delineated by, class requires a social movement strategy. Intersectionality offers such a strategy.

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<sup>30</sup> Angela V. John, *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford, UK; New York, N.Y., USA: B. Blackwell, 1986); Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 3-56.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen King and Allannah Tomkins, *The poor in England 1700-1850: an economy of makeshifts*, eds. Stephen King and Allannah Tomkins (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-19; Sarah Lloyd, "Agents in their own concerns? Charity and the economy of makeshifts in eighteenth century Britain," in *The poor in England 1700-1850: an economy of makeshifts*, eds. Stephen King and Allannah Tomkins (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), chap. 4, 100-136.

<sup>32</sup> Elaine Batty and Ian Cole, *Resilience and the recession in six deprived communities: Preparing for worse to come?* (CRESR: Sheffield Hallam University, 2010), 10, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Elaine Batty and Ian Cole, *Resilience and the recession in six deprived communities: Preparing for worse to come?* (CRESR: Sheffield Hallam University, 2010), 9.

<sup>34</sup> M.A., "The two women's movements 1914," in Patricia Hollis, *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979) 334.

While intersectionality fosters the inclusion and representation of minority groups, it also allows the most privileged and avowed to set the agenda. As the privileged prioritize their needs and interests, they marginalize the most disadvantaged constituents.<sup>35</sup> Thus power and privilege, or oppression and disadvantage, impact standpoints within the labour movement in accordance with the capacity to act and speak publicly.

As workers and labour leaders intersectioned, power dynamics changed as influence from below filtered upwards. As Marie Laperriere and Eleonore Lepinard, and Martinez et al suggest, intersectionality creates complex conditions for agency.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, in the vein of Thomas' Gramscian ideas, this prosopography shows that the state's active process of invalidating workers' voices as inferior, whilst validating its own voice as superior, was in itself a catalyst for workers' protest. As intersectionality initiated an uneven political autonomy from below, some workers became irrepressible citizens, demanding political change, while others became transformative hegemonic bridges to the bourgeois political and civil societies and state.<sup>37</sup>

The Victorian class system underpinned the distribution of wealth and power in society. A person's positionality in relation to power was reflected in a person's social standing. In early Victorian society, up to 5% of the population formed the upper-class aristocracy and gentry, which owned most of the nations' lands and lived off its profits and rents. They maintained state power through the 400 to 500 aristocratic men elected to the House of Lords. In contrast, approximately 80% of the national population formed the productive working classes, who earned wages of up to £300 per annum. The remainder of the population formed the middle classes, who

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<sup>35</sup> Marie Laperriere and Eleonore Lepinard, "Intersectionality as a tool for social movements: strategies of inclusion and representation in the Quebecois women's movement," *Politics* 36, no. 4 (2016): 374-382 (374 - 375); Angela Martinez, Lee Martin and Susan Marlow, "Developing a critical realist positional approach to intersectionality," *Journal of Critical Realism* 13, no. 5 (2014): 447-466 (448).

<sup>36</sup> Angela Martinez, Lee Martin and Susan Marlow, "Developing a critical realist positional approach to intersectionality," *Journal of Critical Realism* 13, no. 5 (2014): 447-466 (452).

<sup>37</sup> Peter D. Thomas, "Refiguring the subaltern," *Political Theory* 04 (2018): 3-4, 7, 11-17.

earned salaries of between £300 and £1,000 per annum in the expanding professional, commerce and manufacturing sectors. While a minority of the working classes were able to enhance their earnings and social mobility, some middle-class workers fell to earning less than £300 per annum.<sup>38</sup>

In 1840s' East London, women workers' grassroots influence was percolating through the national democratic movements of Chartism and Owenism, which held rich Tory capitalists responsible for women's industrial slavery.<sup>39</sup> During this period, women formed benefit societies and at times resorted to trade unionism. It was in this context that Marx developed his belief that workers through their class solidarity could control the modes of production and overthrow class power.<sup>40</sup> Edward Thompson's social history of early nineteenth-century England, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963, revised edn. 1968), argued that 'class is a relationship' as the result of a 'collective experience of opposition to capitalism' created through the labour movement.<sup>41</sup> Thompson's evidence stemmed from contemporary radicals' notions of the 'rights of free-born Englishmen' and suggests that 'class is defined by men as they live their own history'.<sup>42</sup> Anna Clark finds that Thompson not only neglects women's contribution to the construction of class but also the connections between family and political life through which communities recognize their inherited, or shared identities as they developed political and revolutionary action.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Susie Steinbach, "Born into the Lower-Upper-Middle Class." *Understanding the Victorians. Politics, Culture and Society in 19th-Century Britain*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 116.

<sup>39</sup> Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 1995), 1; Thompson, *Outsiders: class, gender, and nation*, (London ; New York: Verso, 1993)77-102; David Jones, "Women and Chartism," *The Journal of the Historical Association* 68, no. 222 (February 1983: 2.)

<sup>40</sup> Susie Steinbach, "Born into the Lower-Upper-Middle Class." *Understanding the Victorians. Politics, Culture and Society in 19th-Century Britain*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 116.

<sup>41</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London: Penguin, 1991), 10; Sonya O. Rose, *Limited livelihoods: gender and class in nineteenth-century England* (London: Routledge, 1992), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Susie Steinbach, "Born into the Lower-Upper-Middle Class." *Understanding the Victorians. Politics, Culture and Society in 19th-Century Britain*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 116.

<sup>43</sup> David Featherstone and Paul Griffin, "Spatial relations, histories from below and the makings of agency: reflections on The Making of the English Working Class at 50," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 3: 375-

The threat of such revolutionary action forced civil society to address the issues of poverty through philanthropy. East London became 'permeated by charity and repercussions of the charitable relationship'.<sup>44</sup> Directly or indirectly, philanthropy affected East London's social and cultural life. By the 1860s, charity workers recognized that some of their middle-class sisters were joining the ranks of sweated workers. The middle-class organization, the Society for the Employment of Women (SPEW), formed to equalize working women's opportunities in the labour market and to raise discussions on industrial womanhood.<sup>45</sup> In 1869, the Charity Organisation Society (COS) became the evangelical state's philanthropic solution and deemed that the responsibility of poverty fell upon the poor, rather than laissez-faire capitalist sweated exploitation.<sup>46</sup>

### **Industrial womanhood**

Alice Clark's *Working Lives of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919) and Ivy Pinchbeck's *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (1930) argued that, prior to the Industrial Revolution, most working-class women worked as part of a family unit for a family wage. The Industrial Revolution radically changed women's lives because it separated the home and the workplace, and women took up a plethora of employment opportunities between 1750 and 1850.<sup>47</sup> From the 1970s gender historians suggest that women and men were ideologically socialized into

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393 (378); Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labour and Working Class History*, Fall, no. 64 112-138; Laura Lee Downs, *Writing gender history, Writing history* (London; New York: Hodder Arnold) 30.

<sup>44</sup> A. J. Kidd, "Philanthropy and the 'social history paradigm'," *Social History* 21, no. 2 (1996): 180-192 (abstract, 180).

<sup>45</sup> Anne Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women" (PhD, University of Gloucestershire, 2003) 36

<sup>46</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 65-69; Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 271-276.

<sup>47</sup> Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English society, 1650-1850: the emergence of separate spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 6-7.

separate spheres.<sup>48</sup> Catherine Hall finds that, by the 1840s, a middle-class evangelical ideology of domesticity had emerged to reconstruct lax upper- and middle-class relationships between the sexes and family life. Women were deemed the “angels” in the private sphere of the home, responsible for the moral education of children and society.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, men were expected to be the family breadwinners and political leaders in the public sphere. While the landed class were able to choose evangelical domesticity, for the middle class it was mandatory.<sup>50</sup> Separate spheres ideology functioned to ensure that middle-class women upheld their family’s respectable status by being a lady of leisure or a homemaker.<sup>51</sup>

Historians disagree on the impact of such ideology upon industrial women workers. Alexander finds that some working-class women denied earning wages to census recorders to uphold an image of respectability.<sup>52</sup> Bridger also finds that middle-class women denied that they earned wages.<sup>53</sup> Pinchbeck argues that separate spheres ideology reduced married women’s double burden of breadwinner and homemaker to concentrate on homemaking and child rearing.<sup>54</sup> However, this

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<sup>48</sup> Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English society, 1650-1850: the emergence of separate spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), 1-12; Laura Lee Downs, *Writing gender history, writing history*, 24-25.

<sup>49</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002), xvi; Philippa Levine, *Victorian feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville, F.A.: University Press of Florida, 1994), 11-12.

<sup>50</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 775; *Women’s History Review* 16, no. 5 (November 2007): 773–782 (775-776); Kathryn Gleadle, “Revisiting Family Fortunes: reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the 1987 publication of L. Davidoff and C. Hall (London: Hutchinson); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Ann Bridger, " A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950 with particular reference to the role of the society for promoting the employment of women" ( PhD diss., 2003, University of Gloucestershire) 36,

<sup>52</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>53</sup> Shoemaker, *Gender in English society, 1650-1850: the emergence of separate spheres?*, 7; Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations," 36.

<sup>54</sup> Jane Rendall, *Women in an industrializing society: England 1750-1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 7.

thesis finds that women's double burden continued. It concurs with Bridger and Deborah Valenze, who argue that women's ideological confinement to the home excluded women from more secure and better paid industrial employment and training opportunities. While Amanda Vickery questions universal middle-class take-up of separate spheres ideology, Emma Francis and Nadia Valman suggest that middle-class community leaders adhered to separate spheres ideology to uphold their communities' respectable status.<sup>55</sup> Simon Morgan finds evidence that some middle-class women charity workers espoused separate spheres ideology while they enacted their agency in the public sphere.<sup>56</sup> Philippa Levine finds that most working-class women were too occupied with their breadwinner role to uphold such a facade.<sup>57</sup>

Working women were aware that separate spheres ideology was part of male patriarchal power, which, as Kate Millett states, installed systematic control and underpinned all social interactions including capitalism.<sup>58</sup> Sally Alexander, Sheila Rowbotham and Barbara Taylor debate if it was 'capitalist patriarchy' or 'patriarchal capitalism' that impacted upon working women. Alexander and Taylor argue that patriarchy theory is necessary to address its 'psycho-sexual relations' and to distinguish sexual conflict from class antagonism. Rowbotham argues that sexual difference does not necessarily imply subordination and oppression. Concentrating

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<sup>55</sup> Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (June 1993): 383-414; Emma Francis and Nadia Valman, "Introduction: revisiting the Victorian East End," 19 *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 13 (2011): 1-7.

<sup>56</sup> Anne Rodrick, "Not-so-separate spheres?" In *Review of a Victorian woman's place: public culture in the nineteenth century* by Simon Morgan H Women, H Net Review, July 2008, 1-2.

<sup>57</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University, 1995) 7-8; Philippa Levine, *Victorian feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994) 106.

<sup>58</sup> Imelda Whelehan, *Modern feminist thought: from the second wave to post feminism* (Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 5.

on patriarchy returns an analysis of women's constraints to biology, the category "woman," and woman's work and wage.<sup>59</sup>

In the 1870s, Emma Paterson called upon civil society to recognize women's need for mutual self-help and financial support as she formed the Women's Protective and Provident League ("the League") to support working-class women's trade unionism.<sup>60</sup> Barbara Drake, Sarah Boston, Sheila Lewenhak and Norbert Soldon's national trade union histories document how working women formed local trade unions under the auspices of the League.<sup>61</sup> This prosopography focuses in detail on working women's formation of trade unions in East London. It also shows that, by the 1880s, East London had become a focus of civil society as it developed political visions through suffrage, the Settlement movement, cooperativism, Liberal politics, Fabian socialism and the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF). As these organizations formed platforms within the labour movement, they advocated and supported women's trade unionism. However, their views on the causes of poverty and the construction of society differed. As women developed their feminist responses to the protection of women workers, 'the woman question' evolved through debates on 'sex versus class'.<sup>62</sup> The women's labour movement became part of what has been coined the "first wave" feminist, or women's movement.

In 1889, as a result of women workers' militancy, working-class Amie Hicks and middle-class executive League member Clementina Black helped form the Women's Trade Union Association ("Association") to support East London's unskilled

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<sup>59</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, "The trouble with patriarchy" in *The feminist history reader*, ed. Sue Morgan (London: Routledge, 2006), 51-58

<sup>60</sup> Sandra Holton, "Women and the vote," in *Women in History: Britain 1850-1945. An introduction*, ed. June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), 280-282; Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 585-61 (585).

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920); Sarah Boston, *Women workers and the trade union movement* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980); Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977); Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan [etc.], 1978).

<sup>62</sup> Karen Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 1.

working women to unionize. This thesis tracks women workers' formation of unions under the auspices of the Association. By 1894, the Association recognized the futility of women's trade unions to create permanent improvements in women workers' conditions, whilst gaining hope in the potential of legislative protection. As the women's labour movement fractured in its support for trade unions and protective legislation, the feminist poles of equal rights and social maternalist feminisms developed. Social maternalist Beatrice Webb and equal rights activist Jessie Boucherett led the discussions around these poles. Barbara Caine reveals how Webb's personal experience informed her take-up of social maternalist feminism and socialist rejection of exploitative capitalism in the form of Fabianism.<sup>63</sup> Social maternalist feminists mooted that working mothers were raising a degenerative race and advocated that a mother's place was in the home.<sup>64</sup>

Ellie Jordan and Anne Bridger chart Boucherett's 'unexpected' equal rights feminism in support of her 'surplus' sister and cynicism of protective legislation.<sup>65</sup> Boucherett, who helped form SPEW, argued that protective legislation restricted women's access to the labour market, while it gave men greater freedom to work whenever and wherever. Equal rights feminists called for men and women workers to be equally protected.<sup>66</sup> Carolyn Malone and Barbara Harrison reveal how SPEW galvanized workers' anti-protective legislation stance through the Women's Industrial Defence Committee (WIDC) and the Women's Employment Defence League (WEDL) alongside the Freedom of Labour Defence (FOLD). This prosopography reveals women workers' participation in these platforms as they lobbied for and against different forms of state protection.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Caine, "Beatrice Webb and the 'woman question'" 6. *History Workshop Journal* 14.1 (1982) 24-44 23-26

<sup>64</sup> Jane Lewis and Celia Davis, "Protective legislation in Britain: 1887-1990: equality, difference and their implications for women," *Policy and Politics* 19.1 (1991) 13-25 (14-15).

<sup>65</sup> Ellen Jordan and Ann Bridger, "'An unexpected recruit to feminism': Jessie Boucherett's 'feminist life' and the importance of being wealthy" *Women's History Review*, 15, no. 3 (2006): 385-412 (387, 403-404).

<sup>66</sup> Philippa Levine, "Consistent contradictions: prostitution and protective labour legislation in nineteenth-century England," *Social History* 19, no. 1 (January 1994): 17-35 (18-22).

<sup>67</sup> Carolyn Malone, *Women's bodies and dangerous trades in England, 1880-1914* (London: Royal Historical Society), chap. 6; Carolyn Malone, "The gendering of dangerous trades: government regulation of women's

As women's work became increasingly defined as hazardous, there were calls for inquiries into women's working conditions.<sup>68</sup> In 1894, the Association formed the Women's Industrial Council (WIC) to lobby for protective legislation and, in 1897, the Association folded into the WIC to focus on investigating women's working conditions and to act as the 'poor woman's lawyer'.<sup>69</sup> Campaigns for women factory and workshop inspectors created a new women's profession.<sup>70</sup> Beatrice Webb galvanized the evangelical philanthropic movement through the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) to ease society's "ills"; namely, working women.<sup>71</sup>

By 1900, women workers' militancy through the labour movements' platforms was at its height. The broad labour movement's middle-class leadership, whilst still wishing to constrain women workers' agency, recognized the potential political power of women workers' agency to create change. The year 1906 was a pivotal one. The Labour Party formed the Women's Labour League (WLL) to help consolidate its power as a parliamentary party. The League's secretary, Mary Macarthur, formed

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work in the white lead trade in England, 1892-1898," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 1 (1996): 15-35; Barbara Harrison, *Not only the 'dangerous trades': women's work and health in Britain, 1880-1914* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 208, 237.

<sup>68</sup> Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, *Dignity and daily bread: new forms of economic organising among poor women in the Third World and the First* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 177-188; Gerry Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005).11-12, Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Gower, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Ellen Mappen, "Helping women at work: the Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914," (London: Hutchinson in association with The Explorations in Feminism Collective, 1985). 63.

<sup>70</sup> Ruth Livesey, "The politics of work: feminism, professionalisation and women inspectors of factories and workshops," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004); Sheila Blackburn, "'The inspector can check a workroom is insanitary by means of his own eyes and nose': rethinking the sweatshop in Victorian and Edwardian Britain," in *Class and Gender in British labour history: renewing the debate (or starting it?)*, ed. Mary Davis (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2011); Mary Drake McFeely, *Lady inspectors: the campaign for a better workplace, 1893-1921* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> Serena Kelly, "A sisterhood of service: the records and early history of the National Union of Women Workers," *Journal of Society of Archivists* 14.2 (1993) 167-74 168; Malone, *Women's bodies and dangerous trades in England, 1880-1914*, chap. 6.

the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) to unionize working women excluded from male trade unions. Macarthur also supported the formation of the National Anti-Sweating League (NASL) to demand a minimum wage for trades undertaken in homes; a form of which came to be installed in the Trades Act 1909.<sup>72</sup> In 1914, women workers reformed their branch of the Women Social and Political Union into the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) to lobby for women's suffrage whilst setting up community social welfare and industrial initiatives.<sup>73</sup> It is through these latter organizations that working-class women's voices become louder. Given that, by 1914, many middle-class women had become part of the industrial labour force, many of them had joined their working-class peers in enacting their four pillars of agency within the broad labour movement.

### **Four pillars of agency (volition, materialist, political and corporeal)**

#### **Pillar one: volition**

Luce Irigaray states that the most subjugated woman has thoughts, and the creation of thoughts requires a sense of self. She takes up Foucault's 'technologies of self' to account for a woman's active transformative engagement with the world. The process of reshaping their social and symbolic positioning and subjectivity alienates women from their old perspectives and shakes existing relationships.<sup>74</sup> Such a transformation requires autonomy. Cornelius Castoriadis places autonomy as

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<sup>72</sup> Jenny Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, V.T., USA: Gower, 1986), 195-203; Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 105; Richard Mudie-Smith, *Handbook of the Daily News Sweated Industries Exhibition* (London: Daily News, 1906).

<sup>73</sup> Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911*, 178; June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002) 152; Patricia W. Romero, *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: portrait of a radical* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1987) 71; Rosemary Taylor, *In letters of gold: the story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 14-19.

<sup>74</sup> Miri Rozmarin, "Living politically: an Irigarayan notion of agency as a way of life" *Hypatia* 28.3 (Summer 2013) 469-482, 469-470

central to understanding the changing gendered power relations structured in late-capitalist societies.<sup>75</sup> However, autonomy is seen as a masculine construction, because, as Anderson states, autonomous agents must regard themselves as authorized to act on their own interests and order preferences. They do not 'bow down to social convention, tradition or even morality', nor do they follow other people's reasons for how they should act. Secondly, autonomous agents must regard themselves as the source of their claims.<sup>76</sup> In East London, male autonomy is visible and drives women's feminist attempts to understand oppression, subjection and agency.<sup>77</sup> Autonomy consists of a capacity to critically reflect on one's aims, aspirations and motivations, and remake oneself into a fully 'self-made (wo)man'.<sup>78</sup> This prosopography reveals a dynamic model of social reproduction in which different political opinions existed and transformed individuals' selfhoods. As people developed their volition to create change, they in turn reformed their selfhood.

## **Pillar two: materialist agency**

Philosopher Anton Ford highlights that change evolves through thoughts that spur volition to the mental and physical materialist transaction of ideas.<sup>79</sup> Miri Rozmarin notes that materialist agency 'is the power to transact with something, or someone else'.<sup>80</sup> She argues that the 'immediate object of agency' is not oneself, but

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<sup>75</sup> Lois McNay, "Psyche and society: Castoriadis and the creativity of action," *Gender and agency: reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press ; Blackwell Publishers, 2000), Chap 4, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Natalie Stoljar, 'Autonomy and the feminist intuition,' in *Relational autonomy: feminist perspectives on autonomy, agency and the social self*, eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chap. 4, 94-111. 97.

<sup>77</sup> Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, "Introduction: autonomy refigured," in *Relational autonomy: feminist perspectives on autonomy, agency, and the social self*, eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chap 1, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Linda Barclay, 'Autonomy and the social self,' in *Relational autonomy: feminist perspectives on autonomy, agency and the social self*, eds. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53-54; McNay, *Gender and agency: reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory*, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Anton Ford, "Is agency a power of self movement?" *The Inquiry* 56.6 (2013) 597-610, 597.

<sup>80</sup> Miri Rozmarin, *Living politically: an Irigarayan notion of agency as a way of life*, 601.

the 'extra-corporeal object or the second bearer of the power' or, as Aristotle termed it, the 'matter'. As communities developed in East London so people transacted their political thoughts in response to their homogenized outcast lowness through the platforms of the democratic and labour movements. However, as the English novelist and travel writer Michael de Larrabeiti argues, nineteenth-century language cannot be taken at face value. Historians need to understand language through its context to de-code it.<sup>81</sup> As working class women created conduits for their voices through these mostly male or middle-class women's platforms, they embodied subjectivities in their self-identities. While some used persuasive rhetoric to appease and gain their audiences' support, others' feminist rhetoric was more direct. As Sally Alexander notes, language is central to the construction of gendered class identity.<sup>82</sup> While this prosopography shows the importance of the dissemination of language, it also reveals that disavowal was not the incapacity to speak; it was the refusal of others to listen. Hence it highlights that the disavowed resorted to their corporeal power as their bodies transacted their materialist agency.

### **Pillar three: political agency**

As working-class women's political feminist agency evolved through experience and debates on political antagonism, it is useful to take up Irigaray's notion of agency as a political-feminist way of life. While Irigaray suggests that political agency orientates the philosophical and political direction of change, Rozmarin opines that agency is both the outcome and the condition of a political life, aimed at creating political transformations.<sup>83</sup> Chantal Mouffe usefully differentiates between the political and politics. The political refers to an antagonistic dimension of the governed who are furthest from the centre of governance, such as sweated women workers. This antagonist dimension can never be eradicated because it is

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<sup>81</sup> Michael de Larrabeiti, 'Conspicuous before the world: the political rhetoric of Chartist women,' in *Radical femininity: women's self-representation in the public sphere*, ed. Eileen Yeo (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; St Martin's Press, 1998), Chap 4.

<sup>82</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 17-33; McNay, *Gender and agency: reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory*, 109-110.

<sup>83</sup> Rozmarin, *Living politically: an Irigarayan notion of agency as a way of life*, 469.

always present in relations of governance and authority. Political questions always involve decisions that require making a choice between conflicting alternatives. Consequently, politics refers to those who have the power and authority to engage with the power structure, such as the enclosing state, as conceptualized by Spivak.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Monique Nuijten finds that ordinary people who live on the margins of the state manifest their political agency at the grassroots when they actively question the state's power structure and authority.<sup>85</sup>

#### **Pillar four: corporeal agency**

Given that women's physical exploitation became the catalyst for their materialist agency, their bodies became their political negotiation tool. Mimi Sheller states that the body is the 'immediate object of power' and Ford notes that its 'agency is the power of self-movement'.<sup>86</sup> As women's bodies increasingly became points of exploitation, I take up Sheller's view that race and ethnic politics are played out sexually, and sex is played out through racial and ethnic politics. However, as Midgley reveals, these oppressive geometrics became the catalyst for women of different ethnic backgrounds to develop their community and activist voices.<sup>87</sup> As Cricklow posits, 'politics of the body and sexual citizenship must be central to any

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<sup>84</sup> Briony Jones, "Ensuring a political space for conflict by applying Chantal Mouffe to postwar reconstruction and development," *Progress in Development Studies* 14, no. 3 (2014): 249–259 (256); Monique Nuijten, "Political activism and the PAH (Platform of Mortgage Victims) in Spain: the significance of Franz von Benda-Beckmann's work for the study of power, political agency and legal pluralism at the grassroots," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 47, no. 3 (2015): 476-492 (476-477).

<sup>85</sup> Monique Nuijten, Political activism and the PAH (Platform of Mortgage Victims) in Spain: the significance of Franz von Benda-Beckmann's work for the study of power, political agency and legal pluralism at the grassroots," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 47, no. 3 (2015): 477.

<sup>86</sup> Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from below: erotic agency and Caribbean freedom*, Next wave: new directions in women's studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Mimi Sheller, "Historical temporality and generational identity: of standoffs and stalled time," *Small axe: a Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 46 (2015) 169-177; Anton Ford, "Is agency a power of self movement," *The Inquiry* 56, no. 6 (2013): 597-610, (597).

<sup>87</sup> Clare Midgley, "Ethnicity, "race" and empire," in *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945. An introduction*, ed. June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), chap. 10.

liberation movement and to any theory of freedom'.<sup>88</sup> Helen Steward notes that corporeal agency develops as the 'power to move oneself' evolves. Between 1840 and 1914, women became part of Mouffe's 'political'. Their physical presence was increasingly reported as they demonstrated through the broad labour movements' platforms and withdrew their physical labour during strikes. As a minority of working-class women spoke from podiums and their voices were recorded, they inspired the agency of others. Increasingly, working-class women drew themselves into the suffrage and parliamentary party campaigns to change the "politics" of the state. By 1914, working-class women had created an uneven political autonomy.

This prosopography provides a local history of the organization of women's employment and women workers' agency.<sup>89</sup> It lies alongside Lousie Raw's East London history of the 1888 match women's strike and Ursula de la Mare's history of Bermondsey's 15,000 female factory strikers in 1911.<sup>90</sup> It can also be compared to other local histories, such as Harold Benenson's history of Lancashire's working women's consciousness, 1880-1914, and Katarina Honeyman's history of female trade unionism in Leeds clothing trades, 1880 to 1914.<sup>91</sup>

## Primary sources

At a time when working-class women's literacy levels were low and many believed that working-class women's place was in the quiet passive feminine

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<sup>88</sup> Michaleine A. Crichlow, "Categories, citizenship, erotic agency and the problem of freedom," *Small Axe: a Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 46 (2012): 147-159 (150-151).

<sup>89</sup> Sonya Rose, "Gender at work': sex, class and industrial capitalism," *History Workshop Journal* 21, no. 1 (March 1886): 113-132 (114); Pat Hudson, "Women and industrialization," in *Women's history: Britain 1850-1945. An introduction.* ed. June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), 23-40.

<sup>90</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light : the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011); Ursula de la Mare, "Necessity and rage: the factory women's strikes in Bermondsey, 1911," *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008): 63:80.

<sup>91</sup> Katrina Honeyman, "Sweat and sweating: women workers and trade unionists in the Leeds clothing trade, 1880-1980," in *Class and gender in British labour history: renewing the debate (or starting it?)*, ed. Mary Davis (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2011), 55-75; Harold Benenson, "The 'family wage' and working women's consciousness in Britain, 1880-1914," *Politics and Society* 19, no. 1 (1991): 71-108.

domestic sphere, working women's written representation of themselves is scarce. Yet it was a time when many wrote about working-class women. There is a wealth of sources written by the largely middle-class civil society describing working-class women's physical exploitation and degradation. However, very few of these writings include their subjects' voices, or even testify to working-class women's physical and mental strength. Katrina Navickas warns that reliance upon such nineteenth-century accounts leaves the historian open to reproducing the writers' subjective Victorian understandings.<sup>92</sup> Victorian journalists, such as Henry Mayhew and Charles Dickens, wrote for their middle-class readership, so, whilst raising concern for workers' poverty they also embedded workers' class marginalization. Jacqueline Turton points out that Mayhew's subjective writings showed both sympathy and repugnance for his working-class subjects, and relied upon information that was not meticulously collected, or interpreted, to avoid bias by his helpers.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Charles Booth's *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London* between 1886 and 1903 amassed 17 volumes of subjective notes on the poor's lives. Gertrude Himmelfarb notes that Stedman Jones' reliance upon such "mythologizing" sources limited his nineteenth-century panorama of East London's socio-economic and political landscape.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the bias within these sources, they are still important. The historical detail held within such sources is useful in the creation of a chronology of events. I gleaned much from Barbara Drake's *Women in Trade Unions* (1920), who, as a member of the Fabian Society and a trade unionist, was part of the labour movement.<sup>95</sup> These sources show civil society's active process of disavowal through their invalidation of women workers as uncivil outcasts, or victims of slavery. As

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<sup>92</sup> Katrina Navickas, "Of Cultural History and Class: A Reply to Andersson," January 2016, accessed March 27 2019, <http://jvc.oup.com/2016/01/08/katrina-navickas-what-about-space-a-reply-toandersson/>.

<sup>93</sup> Jacqueline Turton, "Mayhew's Irish: the poor in the mid nineteenth century London," in *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the local dimension*, eds. Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 1999), 124.

<sup>94</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Review of Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society by Gareth Stedman Jones," *The American Historical Review* 78, no. 5 (December 1973): 1467-1468.

<sup>95</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (London: Labour Research Department, 1920)

Claire Annorsley states, 'behind the text are lives'.<sup>96</sup> For example, Booth's interpreted workers' incomes as a reflection of their low social class and morality.<sup>97</sup> Many middle-class activists, such as Edith Simcox, Annie Besant and Helen Blackburn, wrote histories of their activism and that of the labour movement. Their autobiographical accounts reveal how they represented or even "managed" working-class women rather than worked with them.<sup>98</sup> Pauline Polkey notes that Blackburn was aware of how autobiography was interwoven with time. However, when Blackburn stated that 'to tell the story of one is to tell the story of another' she did not recognize that not everyone shares the same standpoint.<sup>99</sup> Thus, chapter 4 of this prosopography includes biographies of nine working-class trade union secretaries. This chapter is important because it attempts to develop an understanding of how they became politically active, their different standpoints and their relevance to the history of women's trade union activism in East London. What transpires is how their intersection in the different political platforms reconstructed the broad labour movement. Thus, I heed Deborah Thom's advice not to see 'them as others saw them, more of seeing them as they saw themselves'.<sup>100</sup>

I piece primary sources together to contextualize women workers' gendered physical experience in East London. I systematically searched for working-class women's participation in the democratic and labour movements' newspapers, reports and archives. I looked for evidence of their feminism in relation to patriarchy and capitalism, debates on separate spheres and womanhood, and demands for political

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<sup>96</sup>Gayle Letherby, *Feminist research in theory and practice* (Buckingham : Open University Press, 2003) 62.

<sup>97</sup> Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London*, vol. IV (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902); "Charles Booth's London: poverty maps and notebooks," accessed October 15 2018, <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>.

<sup>98</sup> Helen Blackburn, *Women's suffrage: a record of the women's suffrage movement in the British Isles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1902), 5; Edith Simcox, "Eight years of co-operating shirtmaking," *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review* 15, no. 88 (1884); Annie Beant, *An autobiography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893).

<sup>99</sup> Pauline Polkey, "Reading history through autobiography: politically active women of late nineteenth century Britain and their personal narratives," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 3 (2000): 483-500 (484).

<sup>100</sup> Cathy Hunt, "The fragility of the unions: the work of the National Federation of Women Workers in the regions of Britain, 1906-1914," in *Class and gender in British labour history: renewing the debate (or starting it?)*, ed by Mary Davis, . (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2011).171-179 (172).

rights. I created a chronology of events and noted the sporadic names and voices of women speakers, and the numbers and descriptions of women attendees. Given that the trade union movement was initiated under the premise that working women would represent themselves, it has to be noted that these accounts largely tend only to record the voices of the middle-class activists and the trade union secretaries' reports of their meetings. Perhaps the exclusion of union members' voices was an oversight on the part of the League's executive or that they did not think the reports an appropriate vehicle for union members' opinions. The reports, however, include useful details, such as meeting attendee numbers, meeting descriptions and current membership numbers and accounts.<sup>101</sup>

It was through these reports that I was able to capture the names of trade union secretaries. I researched their names in the census to identify their history of industrial work, their families' socio-economic backgrounds and their home addresses in relation to their workplaces. Because women's trade unionism was increasingly widely reported, I was then able to capture the secretaries' voices in greater detail through the digitized newspaper resources; namely, that of the online resource, the British Newspapers Archive. I also browsed through hard copy, microfilmed and fished, local, regional and national newspapers, via the Tower Hamlets microfilm newspaper collection. I also browsed other newspapers, journals and records relevant to democratic and labour movements in various special collections.

From this evidence I drew out the nine most recurrent names of activist working-class women who had worked in the trades they represented. These were: bookbinders, Miss Mary Elizabeth Zugg (1823-1861) and Miss Eleanor Whyte (1824-1913); upholsterers, Miss Jeanette Gaury (or Gawry) Wilkinson (1841-1886) and Miss Elizabeth Amy Mears (1841-1895); tailoresses and garment makers, Miss Rosa Mariner (1841-1908), Miss Marian Barry (1871-1911) and Miss Frances Hicks (1862-1928); confectioner, Miss Clara Grace (Claire) James (1866-1954); and ropemaker,

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<sup>101</sup> London, L.S.E. Women's Protective and Provident League, "Women Union Journal, The Women's Trade Union Review: quarterly report of the Women's Trade Union League, Annual reports." London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, National Federation of Women Workers. HD6079, HD6135.

Mrs Amelia (Amie) Jane (1839/40-1917). These subjects' reported attendances and words at meetings across the country were often reprinted in newspapers in other industrial areas. Some articles were even reprinted abroad, indicating how renowned they became and how their participation in East London's labour movement was relevant to the national labour movement.

## Trades

I uncover the diversity and size of East London's trades through trade directories and inquiries, such as those undertaken by George Dodd in 1843, William Crory in 1875, Frank Galton in 1896 and the Women's Industrial Council (WIC) from 1894.<sup>102</sup> Company records, such as those of the ropemakers, Frost Brothers Ltd and Timpson & Hawkins, provide evidence of women workers' working conditions and the industrial processes they undertook.<sup>103</sup> Van Kleeck's documentation of the bookbinding trade in New York parallels that of Ramsey MacDonald's 1906 WIC report detailing the work of women bookbinders.<sup>104</sup> Descriptions of women workers' working conditions are found in the trade union secretaries' reports to inquiries and commissions and the League's and associations' executive members' archives, for

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<sup>102</sup> George Dodd, *Days at the factories; or, the manufacturing industry of Great Britain described, and illustrated by numerous engravings of machines and processes*. Series I: London (London: C. Knight & Co., 1843); William Glenny Crory, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876); Frank W. Galton, *Workers on their Industries* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1896); London. L.S.E, Women's Industrial Council, *Women's Industrial News* (London: 1895-1911), HD6050; Women's Industrial Council, *Annual reports, 1895-1911*, which includes articles such as WIC "Upholstery as a trade women for women", *Women's Industrial News*, March (1900); Clementina Black, *Married Women's Work: being the report of the an inquiry undertaken by the Women's Industrial Council* (G. Bell: London, 1915).

<sup>103</sup> University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, "Correspondence relating to the strike at Frost Brothers, 'letters', 1890-1891, East London Ropemakers Trade Union." 627/4/1/1-11; London, Bishopsgate Library Frost Brothers Ltd, Rope makers and yarn spinners, 1906, LCM/351; Bishopsgate Library; Charles H. Hawkins, *The story of Hawkins & Tipson: as told as a series of reminiscences* (London: Hawkins & Tipson Ltd, 195?).

<sup>104</sup> Mary Van Kleeck, *Women in the bookbinding trade* (New York: Survey Associates, 1913); James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P. S. King & Son, 1904).

example, the archive of Gertrude Tuckwell.<sup>105</sup> Evidence of working women's industrial skills can be found in catalogues, for example, 'Bookbinding: art of bookbinding'.<sup>106</sup> Activists Frances Hicks and Edith Simcox documented their personal experience of the garment making trade.<sup>107</sup> I also refer to archives that highlight rare incidents of working women's representation of themselves, for example, the file of the court case Allen & Sons vs Louisa Hewlett, or their participation in the 1906 *Daily Mail* exhibition.<sup>108</sup>

## Democratic and labour movements

During the 1840s, grassroots debates were reported in a range of newspapers, including *The Northern Star & Leeds General Advertiser*, *The Chartist Circular*, *The Southern Star and London and Brighton Patriot* and *The English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales*. The feminist voices of Chartist Elizabeth Neesom, Mary Ann Walker and Miss Cleopatra Maria Susannah Inge were reported in local, regional and national newspapers, as was the

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<sup>105</sup> London Metropolitan University, Trade Union Congress Library, The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," (March 1892); Gertrude M. Tuckwell et al., *Woman in industry from seven points of view* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1908); London Metropolitan University, Trade Union Congress Library, Gertrude Tuckwells archive 19/1, 19/9; "Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891; "The Labour Commission," *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2 1891; Windham Thomas Wyndham, Earl of Dunraven and Mount-Earl and Baron Kenry Quin, "First, second and third reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System: with minutes of evidence and appendix," ([S.l.]: [s.n.], 1888-1889).

<sup>106</sup> Frederick Rogers, "The art of bookbinding," in *Workers on their industries*, ed. Frank Wallis Galton (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896).

<sup>107</sup> Frances Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," in *Workers on their industries*, ed. Frank Wallis Galton (London: Swan SonnenSchen & Co, Ltd, 1896); Edith Simcox, "Eight years of co-operating shirtmaking," *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review* 15, no. 88 (1884).

<sup>108</sup> London, L.S.E. Allen & Sons vs Louisa Hewlett, Women's Industrial Council, WIC/D; London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," (March 1892), 19/1, 19/9 Gertrude Tuckwell Archive; Richard Mudie-Smith, *Handbook of the Daily News Sweated Industries Exhibition* (London: *Daily News*, 1906).

bible binders' strike.<sup>109</sup> The British Newspaper Archive facilitates the retrieval of reports of women's activism in East London that were republished in newspapers around the country.<sup>110</sup> From the 1880s, *Justice: The Organ of the Social-democracy* and *The Commonweal: The Official Journal of the Socialist League* included debates on womanhood.<sup>111</sup> Newspaper clippings and ephemera files held within various collections of trade unionist papers are useful in creating a chronology of events as well as detailing women's participation at events. These sources include the archives of: politician and writer, George Howell (1833-1910); freethinker and cooperator, George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906); trade unionist and political activist and MP, John Burns (1858-1943); Jewish trade unionist, William Wess (1861-1946); and women's trade unionist, Gertrude Tuckwell (1861-1951).<sup>112</sup>

I explore women trade union organizations and their campaigns through their archives, annual reports and newsletters, which include the Women's Protective and Provident League's annual reports (1874-1921), the *Women's Union Journal* (1876-1890), the *Women's Trade Union Review* (1891-1919) and the Women's Trade Union League's National Federation of Women Workers archives (1906-1921).<sup>113</sup> I also examined the reports and archives of the Women's Trade Union Association (1889-1897), the Women's Industrial Council (WIC) (1894-1917), and its monthly newsletter *Women's Industrial News* (1897-1919), which reveal its industrial

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<sup>109</sup> *The Northern Star & Leeds General Advertiser* (Glasgow; Leeds: J. Hobson for O'Connor, 1837-1852); *The Chartist Circular* (Glasgow: Universal Central Committee for Scotland, 1839-1842); *The Southern Star and London and Brighton Patriot* (London: O'Brien, 1840); *The English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales* (London: J. Cleave, 1841-1843).

<sup>110</sup> "British Newspaper Archive," accessed 2014-2019, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>111</sup> *Justice: the organ of the social-democracy* (London: Social Democratic Federation, 1884-1825); *The Commonweal: the official journal of the Socialist League*, ed. William Morris (London: Socialist League, 1885-1894).

<sup>112</sup> London, University College University, "Senate House archives". John Burns press cuttings, MS1079/3/1-2; London, Bishopsgate Institute, "Howell ephemera, George Holyoake press cuttings and ephemera". Holyoake/3-5; University of Warwick, "Warwick Modern Records". William Wess, MSS.240/W/10/2; London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, "Gertrude Tuckwell press cuttings".

<sup>113</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, "National Federation of Women Workers". HD6079, HD6135.

investigations and its formation of women's clubs.<sup>114</sup> I also refer to the National Anti-Sweating League (NASL) and its campaign for the minimum wage, the Trades Boards Act and the registers of homeworkers, such as the Homeworkers League, as evidenced in Gertrude Tuckwell and J J Mallon's papers.<sup>115</sup>

## Philanthropy

The development of Victorian civil society in East London can be tracked through the numerous charities listed in the directory, *Burdett's Hospital and Charities Annual*.<sup>116</sup> The charities' records reveal their impact upon East London's inhabitants. The archives of the Elizabeth Fry Refuge further reveal how uncomfortable its clients were in taking up its charity.<sup>117</sup> The COS archives reveal its control over the many charities it funded and its expectation of the charities' provision of religious education.<sup>118</sup> Journalists reported the work of charities and provide detailed descriptions of the attendees. Philanthropic representatives of the state, such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, became an intrinsic construct in the lives of workers and in the labour movement.<sup>119</sup> Reports from the Salvation Army include

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<sup>114</sup> London, L.S.E., The Women's Library, "Women's Trade Union Association and Women's Industrial Council documents," WIC.

<sup>115</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, "Gertrude Tuckwell pressing cuttings, NASL and J. J. Mallon's papers". HD 2336, HD2339; Gertrude M. Tuckwell et al., *Woman in industry from seven points of view* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1908).

<sup>116</sup> *Burdett's Hospital and Charities Annual* (London, 1894).

<sup>117</sup> London, Hackney Archive, Elizabeth Fry Refuge; London Metropolitan Archive, Records of Charity Organisation Society (FWA).

<sup>118</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, A/FWA.

<sup>119</sup> T. J. Dunning, Secretary of the Bookbinders' Society, "Some accounts of the London Consolidated Society of Bookbinders; prepared for the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science," in *Trades' Societies and strikes: report of the Committee on Trade Societies; appointed by the National Association for the Promotion of the Social Science*. Presented at the fourth annual meeting of the Association at Glasgow, ed. Committee on Trade Societies (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860); *Eliza Cook's Journal*, Saturday June 6 1849, 81; "Female labour and emigration," *The Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties* (Colchester, England), December 7 1849.

references to working-class women, either as recipients of charity or as activists.<sup>120</sup> Middle-class gendered views on women workers' sweated poverty were written into history through fictional and non-fictional works, such as John Hollingshead's *Ragged London* and Miss Thackeray's *Toilers and Spinsters*.<sup>121</sup> Civil society's support for trades unionism can also be further tracked through Toynbee Hall Settlement's annual reports and archives.<sup>122</sup> It is through such evidence that this prosopography reveals the entwining of charity and the labour movement.

## Feminism

I tracked feminist analysis of separate spheres through the early middle-class labour movement and the later suffrage movement's newspapers and journals, which include the Langham Ladies Institute feminist newspaper, *English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864), which was initiated by Barbara Bodichon and Emily Faithful, and edited by Bessie Raynor Parks. It includes literary and political content. *The Englishwoman's Review: Journal of Woman's Work* (1858-1864), whose editors included Emilia Boucherett and Helen Blackburn, covered women's employment, education and charity work. Faithful's newspaper, *Women and Work: a Weekly Industrial, Educational, and Household Register* (1874-1876), advertised work to middle-class women.<sup>123</sup> The feminist newspaper, *Women's Penny Paper* (1888-1893), reported on the middle-class movement and provides glimpses of evidence of working-class agency. It then continued as the Liberal women's newspaper, *The Women's Herald*. Lady Henry Somerset bought and renamed it *The Woman's Signal* (1894-1899). Under the editorship of Lady Henry Somerset, it became a vehicle for

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<sup>120</sup> Edward Salmon, "The working classes and religion," *The National Review* 11, no. 63 (1888); Mrs Drummond, "Work and workers: the Salvation Army," *Time* 18 (1888): 541-656.

<sup>121</sup> Miss Thackeray, "Toilers and spinsters," in *Toilers and spinsters and other essays*, ed. Miss Thackeray (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1876); John Hollingshead and Anthony S. Wohl, *Ragged London in 1861* (London: Dent, 1986, 1861).

<sup>122</sup> London, L.S.E., Toynbee Hall, "Annual report of the University Settlements, 1885-1966." HV4236.A7.L8.

<sup>123</sup> *English Woman's Journal* (London: English Woman's Journal Co., 1858-1864); *Englishwoman's Review: journal of woman's work* (London: Victoria Press, 1866-1900); *Women and Work: a Weekly Industrial, Educational, and Household Register for Women* (London: Victoria Press. 1874-1876).

temperance.<sup>124</sup> Patricia Hollis's collection of primary sources document the take-up and rejection of separate spheres and feminisms.<sup>125</sup>

Trade union and charity reports reflect a development from equal rights feminism to social maternalist feminism, which became embedded in the campaigns for protective legislation and the National Union of Women Workers.<sup>126</sup> This prosopography endeavours to track the development of working-class feminisms in relation to women workers' activism in the labour movement. By 1914, working-class women were calling for equal rights in the labour movement and through their franchise. Sylvia Pankhurst's history of the East London Federation of Suffragettes in London documents working women's involvement in suffrage campaigns through the East London Federation of Suffragettes and its newspaper, *Woman's Dreadnought*.<sup>127</sup>

## Structure

This thesis reveals working-class women's lives in East London and how, despite the geometrics of oppression imposed upon them, their creative agency was integral to the creation of local labour geographies. As women found work in local trades, they intersected in the broad democratic and labour movements. As middle-class philanthropists and charity workers entwined themselves in working-class communities, they created platforms for women's trade unionism and political visions in the broad labour movement. As the women's labour movement initiated feminist

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<sup>124</sup> *The Woman's Signal* (London: Marshall & Son, 1894-1899); *The Woman's Herald* (London: [s.n.], 1891-1893).

<sup>125</sup> Patricia Hollis, *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979).

<sup>126</sup> B. L. Hutchins and J. J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* ([S.l.]: Bell, 1915); B. L. Hutchins and Amy Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1903); London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, "National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland (1894-1911)." HD 6079, HD6135.

<sup>127</sup> *Woman's Dreadnought* (London: East London Federation of the Suffragettes, 1914-1917); E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: the history of the women's militant suffrage movement 1905-1910* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Co., 1911); E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London: Longmans & Co., 1931).

debates on separate spheres ideology and industrial womanhood, there were calls for the desaturation of the labour force through emigration and protective legislation. The labour movement also became entwined in suffrage and parliamentary party representation.

Chapters 2 and 3 detail the formative process of working-class women's agency. Chapter 2 contextualizes working-class women's marginalized lives in East London and the formation of communities and the trades around which labour geographies formed. Chapter 3 details examples of women's industrial work and its importance to the local economy. It reveals how this industrial physical experience impacted upon women workers' selfhoods and politicization. Chapters 4 to 8 provide a prosopographical case study of an intergenerational network of working-class trade union secretaries' development of the labour movement and their influence on working-class women's agency. Chapter 4 provides the biographies of an intergenerational network of working-class women trade union secretaries who had been politicized by their industrial experience in the trades they came to represent. As it tracks their personal political feminist journeys that evolved through the four pillars of volition, materialist, political and corporeal agency, it reveals their different political standpoints. This chapter also reveals how important their personal journeys were in the history of East London's labour movement. Chapters 5 to 8 provide a chronology of working-class women's involvement in the development of the labour movement from 1840 to 1914. It tracks women workers' collective industrial and political experience and the four pillars of their agency as they created conduits for their voices through the labour movements' platforms. As the debate of "class versus sex" evolved, working women entrenched their right to be in the labour force as they demanded equal rights in the workplace and society through greater political representation.

## Chapter 2: East London's socio-economic and political landscape, 1840-1914

### Introduction

This chapter documents the constructs of women workers' experience in East London's socio-economic and political landscape. As the landscape evolved into a collage of labour geographies organized around industries and associated trades, women embedded themselves in their communities. As the integral state's civil and political societies marginalized women workers' identities, it hung the responsibility of their degradation upon women workers.

### East London's socio-economic and political landscape

London was the metropole of the British Empire, and East London its port and workshop.<sup>1</sup> East London's cheap accommodation and job market increasingly attracted dislocated persecuted political and economic immigrants and migrants in search of work and homes.<sup>2</sup> In 1841, approximately two-thirds of the capital's inhabitants had been born in London.<sup>3</sup> London's population grew from one million in 1801 to two million in 1851 and was more than seven million by 1911.<sup>4</sup> In 1886, Geographer Ernst Georg Ravenstein undertook the first major study of nineteenth-century migration and immigration to London. Using birthplace data in the 1881

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<sup>1</sup> *Public Ledger & Daily Advertiser* (London: 1759-1911), accessed February 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Irish colonisation in the metropolis," *John Bull* (Monday October 21 1850): 665; Jerry White, *London in the nineteenth century: a human awful wonder of God* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 3.

<sup>3</sup> George Boyer and Timothy Hatton, "Migration and labour market integration in late nineteenth century England and Wales," *Economic History Review* 50, no. 4 (November 1997): 697-734 (703).

<sup>4</sup> Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard, Jamie McLaughlin, et al., "The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913," (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, March 24 2012).

census, Ravenstein found that most incomers came to London as part of a family.<sup>5</sup> Between 1851 and 1901, more than 80% were between 15 and 34 years of age and the majority of the remainder were children, who from an early age contributed to the family wage.<sup>6</sup> Cheryl Bailey found that 38% of London's population were a mixture of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish migrants and that young women and girl migrants outnumbered males.<sup>7</sup> Between 1846 and 1854, the migrant majority was Irish. Approximately 80,000 Irish mostly travelled as part of a family to London. After 1871, Irish migration to England levelled off.<sup>8</sup>

The immigrant majorities were Russian and Polish Jews, who arrived in large waves throughout the nineteenth century. In 1851, approximately 20,000 Jewish incomers arrived in London. Most settled in Aldgate, which, by 1880, was 'nine tenths' Jewish.<sup>9</sup> Booth's investigator, Lewellyn Smith, calculated that, between 1880 and 1886, another wave of 20,000 Jewish incomers arrived.<sup>10</sup> Booth estimated that, by 1914, East London's Jewish population stood at approximately 100,000.<sup>11</sup> There were many other nationalities and cultures too, including gypsy, French Protestant Huguenot, Italian, Greek, African, Asian, Indian, Chinese, German, Austrian and Swiss. By the 1880s, women made up 40% of Russians, Russian-Poles and

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<sup>5</sup> Ernst Georg Ravenstein, *Census of the British Isles, 1871: the birthplaces of the people and the laws of migration* (London, 1876), accessed March 19 2019, <http://books.google.com/books?vid=BL:A0022062401> Google\_Books.

<sup>6</sup> George Boyer and Timothy Hatton, "Migration and labour market integration in late nineteenth century England and Wales" *Economic History Review* 50.4 Nov (1997) 697-734 (703)

<sup>7</sup> Cheryl Bailey, "I'd heard it was such a grand place': mid-19<sup>th</sup> century internal migration to London," *Family & Community History* 14, no. 2 (October 2011): 121-140 (122).

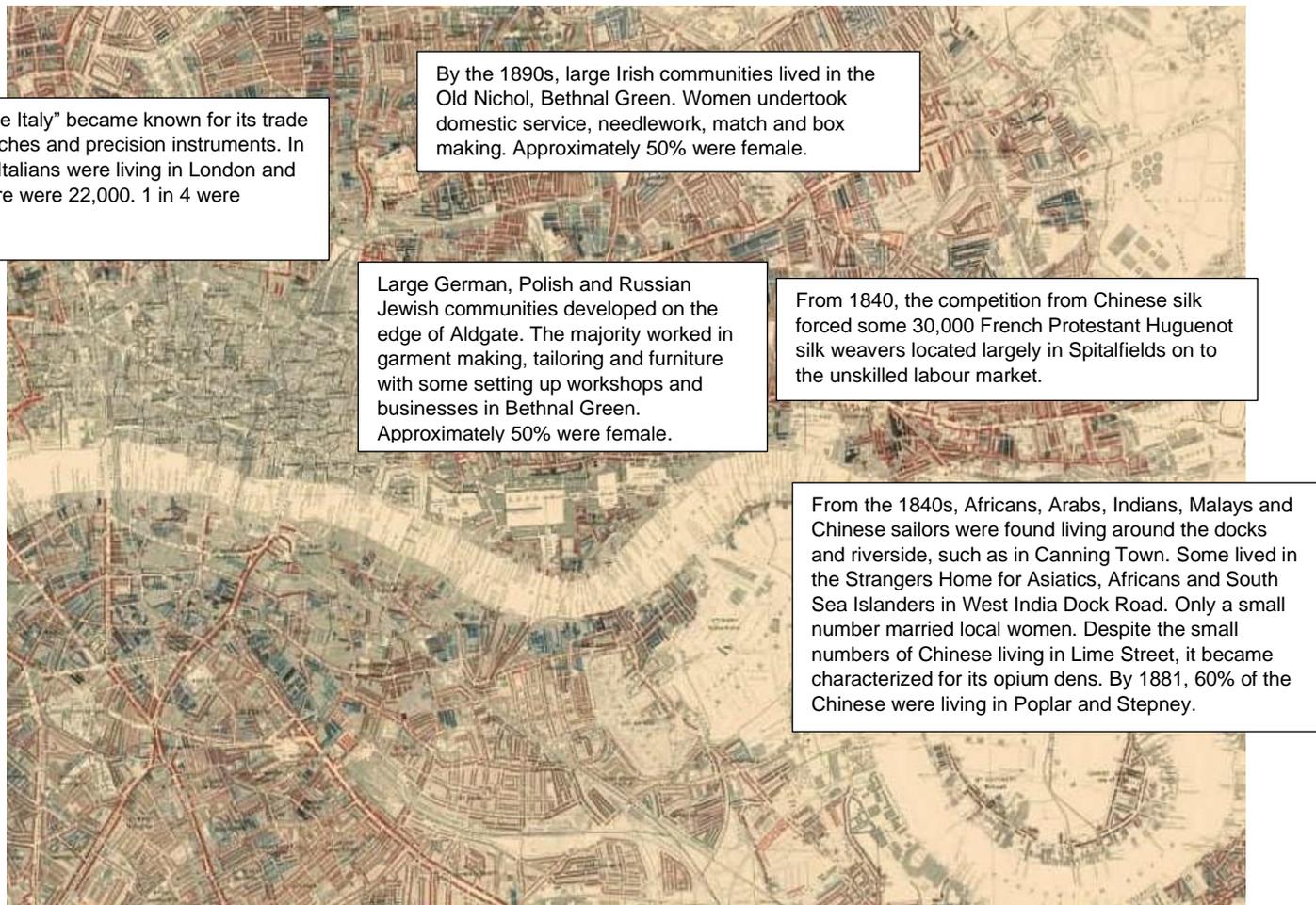
<sup>8</sup> Lara Marks, "Working wives and working mothers: a comparative study of Irish and East European Jewish married women's work and motherhood in East London, 1870-1914," Irish Studies Centre Occasional Paper Series (London: PNL Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>9</sup> 'The City clergy and their stipends,' *Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday September 29 1888, 7, accessed February 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>10</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society* (London: Verso, 2013), 109.

<sup>11</sup> David Feldman, "Jews in the East End, Jews in the polity. 'The Jew' in the text," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 13 (2011): 4; Susan L. Tananbaum, *Jewish immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (London: Routledge, 2014), 6.

Rumanian communities and 31% to 45% of Italian, Austrian, German and Swiss communities in London.<sup>12</sup> By 1914, East London's older demographic had increased. See Figure 4 below for a map of some of East London's labour geographies.



**Figure 4: Map of East London's labour geographies**

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

Across all working-class communities, women worked for wages to support themselves and their dependents. The Statistical Society's inquiry into East London in 1848 showed that, for every 229 women left financially "unprotected" by their

<sup>12</sup> Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard, Jamie McLaughlin, et al., "The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913," accessed March 24 2017, [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0); Susan L. Tananbaum, *Jewish immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (London: Routledge, 2014), 2.

families, there were 125 unprotected men.<sup>13</sup> Harriet Martineau analysed the 1851 census and calculated that there were 500,000 more single women than single men in Britain. Many of these were middle-class unmarried 'surplus', 'redundant' women or widows whose husbands had not made provision for them and were ill-prepared to earn their living.<sup>14</sup> In London, there was also a preponderance of untrained adult middle-class men seeking work.<sup>15</sup>

## The industrial organization of East London

In 1840s' England, industrial capitalists were mass producing standardized goods on economies of scale in large factories using coal-fuelled and steam-powered machines. London's distance from coal mines and the high rents for scarce land inhibited factory installation and so East London could not compete with the other provinces' production of semi-finished and heavy goods. A small number of large employers dominated East London's pre-industrial structures and ancillary trades of handicrafts, finishing goods, consumer trades, semi-processing and capital goods industries like leather and sugar manufacturing, shipbuilding and silk production. In the heart of inner East London, around Brick Lane, there were streets of large affluent Huguenots' garret buildings, which hummed with silk weavers' looms, middle-class residences and male artisans' workshops.<sup>16</sup> London's economy destabilized and hit deep depressions in the years 1839-1842 and 1848-1849. The large employers struggled to create profits as their trades declined.<sup>17</sup> To survive, some employers downsized into small-scale workshop production, or, as Peter Hall

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<sup>13</sup> "Report of the investigation into the state of the poorer classes in St Georges-in-the East," *Quarterly Journal of the Statistical Society of London* (August 1848): 203.

<sup>14</sup> Harriet Martineau, "Female industry," *Edinburgh Review* 222 (April 1859); Norbert C. Seldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan [etc.], 1978), 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen Ross, "'Fierce questions and taunts': married life in working-class London, 1870-1914," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (1982): 576.

<sup>16</sup> "Chartists in Bethnal Green," *Evening London Standard*, Monday January 20 1840; *The Charter: established by the working classes*, 1 (Sunday January 27 1839): 6; Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 1995), 198.

<sup>17</sup> David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 68-87, 111-123, 129-141.

defines it, 'vertical disintegration of production' through sub-dividing, or diluting production processes.<sup>18</sup>

Dilution allowed employers to take advantage of the cheaper abundant unskilled female workers swelling the base of the labour hierarchy. The most vulnerable, the isolated unskilled single mothers and child homeworkers, set the wage standard that men were forced to compete for. Employers justified their offer of low wages as it was unskilled woman's work. So many queued for the work, that workers had no choice but to accept the sweated working conditions. As unemployment rose, competition for work increased and employers cut wages further. Employers contracted "sweaters", who often contracted other sweaters to find cheap workers. The sweaters took their cuts from the contracted workers' wages. This 'anarchy of competition' for wages prevailed even when the economy improved.<sup>19</sup>

Journalist Henry Mayhew found manufacturing organized between the "honourable" and "dishonourable" labour sectors. The honourable sector was largely located in the West End. It produced quality bespoke goods largely undertaken by skilled men in good working conditions. Some honourable trades were inclusive of women and girls, but, generally, apart from those working on female clothing, women undertook the less skilled work. The less respectable, dishonourable "slop" trades supplied the cheap ready-made goods for retail, wholesale showrooms and warehouses. The poorest quality slop work was mostly produced and sold in the East End. Sweated skilled male workers relied upon their unskilled wives and children to help win work by undercutting prices. As the dishonourable sector expanded at the expense of the honourable sector, women and girls became

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<sup>18</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, "Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society." 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2013), 23

<sup>19</sup> Sidney Webb, *The Labour Party on the Threshold*. Tract 17 (London: Fabian Society, 1923), 13; Irene Bruegal, "The reserve army of labour 1974-1979," in *Waged Work: a reader* ed. Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1986), 41; Georgio Riello, "Boundless competition: subcontracting and the London economy in the late nineteenth century," *Enterprise & Society* 13, no. 3 (2012): 504-537.

permanent in the labour market.<sup>20</sup> Although some women picked up trade skills while assisting their parents and husbands, most unskilled women relied upon the needlework skills they had learned in their home.<sup>21</sup> Although needlework's feminine characteristic was used to undervalue women's skilled needlework, it at least allowed them to find waged unskilled slop work.

. As East London's economy's reliance on women workers grew so its poverty increased. It became so impoverished that the master of the overcrowded workhouse St Mathew in Bethnal Green was not able to place the increase in applicants. He stated, 'with wages much lower than in the past...at no former period in the last twenty years has there been such an amount of poverty and wretchedness in this country'.<sup>22</sup> As poverty seeped in, the affluent moved away. Chartist artisans mobilized their 114 protective and political trades societies in and around Brick Lane.<sup>23</sup> Despite many artisans' reliance on their wives to help them earn their wages, many male workers increasingly blamed their sweated exploitation on women workers' saturation of the labour force. Resentment heightened as they ostracized women workers as 'scabs' for lowering their breadwinner wages, and 'whores', implying that only prostitutes worked in the public male sphere.<sup>24</sup>

Many Chartist workers' wives supported the male labour movement in its demands for male family breadwinner wages to provide for their wives and children. Chartism did not consider the economic needs of the voiceless unmarried mother, made even more vulnerable by the Poor Law of 1834 and bastardy legislation, or the

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<sup>20</sup> "Labour and the Poor," *Morning Chronicle*, Thursday January 19 1850; Thursday July 18 1850; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history*, (New York: New York University, 1995)27-55.

<sup>21</sup> Women's Industrial Council, *Women's Industrial News*, March 1902; Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 13.

<sup>22</sup> "Distress," *The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (Leeds, England), Saturday November 13 1841.

<sup>23</sup> *The Charter: established by the working classes*, 1, Sunday January 27 1839, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* 88; Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches : gender and the making of the British working class*,. (Berkeley, Calif; London: University of California Press, 1995) 198

widows with dependents, and single women.<sup>25</sup> In 1840, Tory MP philanthropist Lord Ashley (who became the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury in 1851) saw the Chartist agitation and heard their calls for the expelling of women from the labour force. Ashley lobbied Parliament to set up the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Children's Employment. Richard Henry Horne wrote its first report, 'Children in Mines' (May 1842), which became the foundation for the Mines Act and the subsequent Factory Acts. When women and girls were found dressed as boys working in the mines, their denial saw them represented as 'deplorably ignorant, that they knew not how long they had worked in the pit'.<sup>26</sup> The Mines Act impacted all working women in its appeasement of male workers in its exclusion of women workers through its infantilization of them as children.<sup>27</sup>

Upon researching working conditions in East London, Surgeon Richard Dugard Grainger wrote the Children's Commission's second report, published in 1843. Upon investigating the working conditions of fashionable dressmaking shops, Grainger's report included a needlewoman's own statement that 'no slavery is worse than that of the dress-maker's life in London'.<sup>28</sup> *The Times* article 'White Slaves of London' described East London's needlewomen's 'squalid' appearance and desperate lives, and the prosecution of a widow who pawned her employer's 32

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<sup>25</sup>Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> "The Halifax Guardian relates the particulars of a conviction...for an infringement of Lord Ashley's Act," *Halifax Guardian* 1844.

<sup>27</sup> House of Lords, "Mines and collieries." (HL Deb 14 July 1842, 65: cc101-24), accessed April 1 2019, [https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1842/jul/14/mines-and-collieries#s3v0065p0\\_18420714\\_hol\\_51](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1842/jul/14/mines-and-collieries#s3v0065p0_18420714_hol_51); House of Lords, "Employment of women and children in mines and collieries." HC Deb 07 June 1842, 63: cc1320-64), accessed April 1 2019, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1842/jun/07/employment-of-women-and-children-in>; *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Barnes Grindrod, LLD, *The slaves of the needle: an exposure of the distressed condition, moral and physical of dress-makers, milliners, embroiderers, slopworkers, etc.* (London; Manchets: William Brittain & Charles Gilpin; Irwin 1845), 7; Rev. W. M. McIlwaine, *The dress-maker: a prize essay* (London: Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dress-makers and Milliners, 1846), 22.

shirts to feed her child. It was reprinted across the country.<sup>29</sup> Grainger's report led to the formation of the Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847, which initially limited factory working hours to 12 hours and then further reduced daily working hours to 10 hours. The Acts encouraged the call for the 'removal of all women from factories' as girls followed their mothers into the work and grew up 'in total ignorance of all the true duties of woman'.<sup>30</sup> The Act was subsequently amalgamated into further restrictive Acts, which nationally limited the earning capacity of about 300,000 women and children. As it pushed them into more informal exploitative work, it further impoverished families.<sup>31</sup>

Marx noted in the 1840s that, as skilled trades diminished, skilled workers joined the semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the class residuum of the 'pauperised lumpen proletariat' living in ghettos across London.<sup>32</sup> Mayhew's article 'The slopworkers and needlewomen' in the *Morning Chronicle*, 23 November 1849, continued the debate on women's wage exploitation.<sup>33</sup> Although needlework was by far the most common type of women's work, Mayhew and Arthur Munby noted the diverse range of sweated manufacturing work undertaken by women workers. They found women made artificial flowers, boxes, sacks, umbrellas, straw hats and bonnets and bricks. They sorted rags and pulled fur and were licensed victuallers, laundresses and shopkeepers. Women worked everywhere: in their homes, in workshops, in factories and in the streets.<sup>34</sup> Sally Alexander's analysis of the 1851 census shows that in

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<sup>29</sup> "White Slaves of London," *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Wednesday November 1 1843; "The white slaves of London," *Bristol Mercury* (Bristol, England), February 7 1846.

<sup>30</sup> From the report of the "The Ten Hours factory question," in Patricia Hollis, *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Gerry Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2, 12; Sonya O Rose, *Limited livelihoods: gender and class in nineteenth-century England* (London: Routledge, 1992) 55-57.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 19-24; Irene Bruegal, The reserve army of labour 1974-1979 in *Waged Work: a reader* edited by Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1986), 4

<sup>33</sup> "Slopworkers and needlewomen," *Morning Chronicle*, November 23 1849, in *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement*, ed Patricia Hollis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979) 66.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*. 41-55; Norbert C. Seldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978)8-9, 15.

London approximately 330,000 women over the age of 20 worked for wages. A total of 140,000 were employed in domestic service, another 125,000 worked in clothing and shoemaking, a further 11,000 were employed as teachers and 9,000 worked in the silk industry.<sup>35</sup> Owenite George Holyoake recalled a wide array of paid work undertaken by women in his upper-working-class neighbourhood.<sup>36</sup>

East London was becoming a centre of small-scale entrepreneurial production. A total 86% of employers employed less than 10 men each. Employers increasingly relied upon homeworkers, who bought their own hand tools, such as sewing machines and bandsaws. As slop goods pushed down the prices of bespoke goods, East End factories and workshops increasingly supplied the West End's retail establishments. The honourable sector's bespoke trades, such as furniture and upholstery, diminished, and skilled workers were forced "eastwards" to work in the dishonourable sector.<sup>37</sup> As incomers arrived and set up new trades, creative skilled work was everywhere. Workshops were making garments, carriages, furniture and jewellery for the West London markets alongside cheap, ready-made goods and clothes for the more prosperous working classes. Women were entrepreneurial, for example, 94% of the 1,040 milliner businesses listed in the 1842 'The Post Office London Directory' were run by women.<sup>38</sup> Production and markets were enhanced through new communication links. As East London expanded to the north and east with new factories in the Isle of Dogs, older industries were forced into decline. London's increasing population squeezed in and around its industries, trades and transport links, creating new labour geographies. As slopwork increased and diversified, it buoyed East London's industrial economy.

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 15, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (London: Virago, 1983), 78; Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Women's Industrial Council, "Women's Industrial News, March 1902," in *Furnishing the World: the East London Furniture Trade, 1830-1980*, ed. Pat Kirkham (London: Journeyman Press, 1987), 103.

<sup>38</sup> Nicola Pullin, "'A heavy bill to settle with humanity': the representation and invisibility of London's principal Milliners and dressmakers," in *Famine and Fashion: needlewomen in the nineteenth century*, ed. Beth Harris (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 215.

The docks' 115 wharves saw huge imports of new seasonal raw materials from the colonies. Industries, trades and markets developed around these imports and subsequent new products and markets, both at home and in the Empire.<sup>39</sup> One trade's seasonal downtime was another's busy period. Employers honed their use of flexible labour to avoid gluts in production, such as in the fashion trade when seasons changed, or when employers won a contract for a rush order. By the 1860s, Henry Mayhew had related unskilled women's take-up of increasingly diverse work with the worsening poverty. He saw a 'moral and intellectual change' and stated it 'seemed we were...amongst another race' in the East.<sup>40</sup> As all family members were forced to work to earn a combined family wage, the capitalists were assured of an abundant, reliable, flexible and cheap labour force. During economic troughs, whole families relied upon women and girls' wages. During the 1866 depression, Mayhew found the trades in Spitalfields and Bethnal Green to be the most sweated.<sup>41</sup>

Training opportunities were hard to secure. Female apprenticeships were of a lower standard than boys and mostly existed to allow employers to further cheapen labour.<sup>42</sup> The better female apprenticeships tended to be in feminine needle trades, such as dressmaking and millinery, leatherwork, bookbinding and hatting.<sup>43</sup> The clerk of the Guardians of the City of London Union refused a Spitalfields' boot closer an apprenticeship for a pauper Jewish girl because they would be 'overrun with people who wanted £10 a girl'. When the clerk advised that she should be 'sent into service' instead, a Mr Williams responded that 'very few families would take Jewish servants'.<sup>44</sup> Grainger opined to the 1864 Children's Employment Commission that apprenticeships would have a detrimental health effect on pubescent girls. The 'lure of city life' would lead them to take up 'wages of sin', and the lower-class girl would

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<sup>39</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave), 20, 55; Frances Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," in *Workers on their industries*, ed. Frank Wallis Galton (London: Swan Sonnenschen & Co, Ltd, 1896), 16-19; Angela V. John, *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford, UK; New York, N.Y., USA: B. Blackwell, 1986), 74.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 25, 33-41.

<sup>44</sup> "Female Labour," *Englishwoman's Review*, January 15 1877, 29-30.

lead the more respectable girl astray. Mayhew took issue with Grainger, stating that all women of any social class could fall into prostitution by sweated labour rather than inferior morals.<sup>45</sup> The Education Act 1870 did, however, offer a minority of working-class girls the opportunity to promote themselves to white-collar clerical and retail work, and in doing so improve their earnings and status.<sup>46</sup>

By this point, London's textile, heavy engineering and ship building had diminished to repairs, or fine finished work, and masses of male workers sought employment in the sweated small-scale trades. The national Great Depression of 1873 to 1896 hit, with 1879 being particularly bad. When families failed to pay their outstanding debts to local shops and trades, their creditors and local labour geographies were pushed into jeopardy.<sup>47</sup> In 1875, in order to counteract East London's reputation of degradation, William Glenny Crory investigated the industrial working conditions in various trades, including printing, ropemaking and confectionery. With the companies' permission, Crory examined industrial practices and workers. He failed 'to meet with that disorderly, disreputable class of work-people...whose demerits and moral needs so make many fames'. Instead, he found that 'East London work-people, men, boys and women, as a class, are worthy members of society, and as a rule can earn their wages honestly'. He concluded that workers 'earn sufficient...not to be fit objects of either patronage, or pauper relief at the hands of pseudo-philanthropists'.<sup>48</sup> Crory noted the increasing mechanization and fluctuations in work.

By 1883, independent women were becoming publicly visible in East London. SPEW listed boarding houses; one being in Hackney. It offered daytime and evening technical courses alongside waitress training. Despite the increasing training and working opportunities, permanent work was difficult to find. SPEW only offered 68 permanent positions in comparison to 387 temporary and 69 learner posts and

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 95.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 48.

<sup>48</sup> William Glenny Crory, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), 200.

apprenticeships. Traditional needlework was still their most common job offer. It offered 40 temporary positions in upholstery and needlework. Although SPEW had 570 registered names, it had had 2,430 applicant letters and they had made 3,493 visits to applicants.<sup>49</sup> By the late 1880s, Charles Booth found East London's economy to be one of diverse consumer-led manufacturing. It combined new technology and scientific methods alongside traditional ways of working and selling. Hawkers, markets, shops and large warehouses were everywhere. Sweating had intensified with wholesalers and retailers.<sup>50</sup>

East London's complex interconnected fragile economy was easily broken by economic troughs, new competitors or product saturation. The anarchy of competition pushed wages down as flexible workers queued for work when a trade began its new season. Vulnerable workers were pitted against vulnerable workers; community against community; male against female; adult against child. Booth found that 30.7% of all of London's poor lived on or below his absolute poverty line of 10 to 20 shillings a week for a family of 4 or 5.<sup>51</sup> Booth's distinction between the casual residuum and the 'true working classes' of skilled workers does not acknowledge the number of skilled workers forced to work in casual unskilled trades or skilled casual work. Neither does it acknowledge the cultural and gender differences within the labour force, or the breakdown of social class as middle-class workers joined the labour market.<sup>52</sup> Women workers had great tenacity in finding work in East London's tightly synchronized industries and trades that dovetailed each other. Match makers and confectionery workers became part of the 35,000 seasonal hop workers and fruit

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<sup>49</sup> Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, *24th annual report* (1883), 18.

<sup>50</sup> Georgio Riello, "Boundless competition: subcontracting and the London economy in the late nineteenth century" 504. *Enterprise & Society* 13.3 (2012) 504-537

<sup>51</sup> Donna Loftus, "Investigating work in late nineteenth century London," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 71. (2011) 173-93 (173)

<sup>52</sup> Bruegal, "The reserve army of labour, 1974-1979," 41; Loftus, "Investigating work in the late nineteenth century London," (177-189).

pickers.<sup>53</sup> (See Figure 5 below.) Gertrude Tuckwell also noted that confectionery workers cured fish when the trade 'slacked' for three months.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 5: Women from Stepney, East London, hop picking in Kent**

(Source: *Illustrated London News*, c1911)

By the end of the century, Booth noted that a trade for life was now only possible for the minority, such as cabinet makers, engineers, iron and steel makers, leather dressers, booksellers and millers. The bulk of London's trades, including the finishing trades, remained liable to displacement.<sup>55</sup> East London's landscape was a 'chaotic, diverse and a constantly moving maelstrom of people, trades, industries and commercial exchanges'.<sup>56</sup> Booth saw an organic relationship between large and small business, with the multiplication of the small master, or sweater, being both the cause and effect of the irregularity of work. Sweating pervaded all industries and

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<sup>53</sup>Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 89-90; Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history*, (London: Continuum, 2011), 20, 24, 139, 206.

<sup>54</sup> "Child-slavery in the jam factory," *The Review of Reviews*, May 1897, 468.

<sup>55</sup> Loftus, "Investigating work in the late nineteenth century London," 177, 182.

<sup>56</sup> Loftus, "Investigating work in the late nineteenth century London," 173

trades and was 'spreading like a fungus over the London landscape' as it became the root cause of poverty.<sup>57</sup>

## Philanthropy

Women workers' poverty so alarmed civil society that by the 1840s there were numerous charities in East London.<sup>58</sup> Although the poor took up charity, they did not resort to it blindly. Destitute ex-convicts did not prolong their stay in Elizabeth Fry's refuge because they could not live with its evangelical judgemental code of conduct. During the 1840s, many of the refuge's visitors were Irish; by the 1880s, most were English 'dissenters'.<sup>59</sup> Charities, such as the Mothers' Union, founded in 1850, espoused conservative education and separate spheres ideology that affirmed its recipients' class lowness. Although the Mothers' Union was still in existence in 1885, how successful it was in instilling its values in East London is debateable. The photograph in Figure 6 below, published in the *Illustrated London News*, does not depict attentive listeners, but desperate hungry women.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 82-83; Rosemary O'Day, "Retrieved riches: Charles Booth's Life and Labour of the People in London," *History Today* (April 1989): 30.

<sup>58</sup> *Burdett's hospital and charities annual* (London, 1894).

<sup>59</sup> London, Hackney Archives, Elizabeth Fry Refuge, D/S/58/1.

<sup>60</sup> Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, 119-120.



ATTENDANTS AT MOTHERS' MEETING (Waiting for Distribution of Broken Food).

**Figure 6: Attendants at Mother's Meeting c1900.** This illustration shows a group of seated women. Underneath it reads, 'Attendants at Mothers' Meeting (Waiting for Distribution of Broken Food)'

(Source: *Illustrated London News*)

Communities quickly recognized that they had to protect themselves from English civil society's scrutiny. The French Huguenots set up a hospital for their elderly. In 1856, Maharaja Duleep Singh helped fund the Strangers Home for Asiatic, African and South Sea Islanders in the West India Dock Road, and a Lascar Mission opened in Canning Town.<sup>61</sup>

With so much poverty to address, wealthy philanthropists wished to see charities distribute their donations wisely and enforce an evangelical self-help ethos.<sup>62</sup> In 1869, the COS formed under the guidance of housing reformer Octavia Hill to co-ordinate funding to charities. COS believed that appropriate charity would

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<sup>61</sup> "Strangers Home for Asiatic, African and South Sea Islanders," *London Daily News*, Friday April 13 1855; Emma Francis, and Nadia Valman, "Introduction: revisiting the Victorian East End." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 13 (2011) 1-7(6); Jerry White, *London in the nineteenth century: 'a human awful wonder of God* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007)151 ; "Making Britain Database: Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders," accessed September 2018, <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/strangers-home-asiatics-africans-and-south-sea-islanders>.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 256-257; Steve Hindle, "Poverty and the poor laws," in *The Elizabethan World*, eds. Susan Doran and Norman Jones, chap. 18 (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2014), 302-303.

eliminate the unruly sub-stratum of the London working class and would restore social order by returning working women and girls to the domestic sphere. COS identified the viciously poor with a workhouse test, and rationalized pauperism (poverty's visible form) as largely an act of will, freely chosen and therefore sinful.<sup>63</sup> COS held the view that the idle and casual poor's poverty was the result of their feeble and tainted constitutions after generations of living in decaying slums, which left them 'lazy, shiftless and incapable of regular work'.<sup>64</sup> COS followed the example of Mrs Bayly's *Ragged homes and how to mend them* (1860), which was dedicated to the Earl of Shaftesbury.<sup>65</sup> The urban poor's smells, noise and attitudes often repelled COS's social investigators and voluntary visitors, who labelled them either the deserving thrifty or the undeserving poor. Women workers were represented as passive victims or debased criminals.<sup>66</sup>

Many working-class women, of their own volition, involved themselves in charity work. The Salvation Army's 'distinctly working-class urban sect' in Whitechapel attempted to convert heathen incomers to Christian morality and temperance. Its membership was mostly non-conformist and was drawn from across a spectrum of occupation, skill and status. Crowds of more than 3,000 filled its halls at its meetings to listen to Catherine Booth, who became a role model for working-class women as she ensured male and female members' equal status.<sup>67</sup> Stedman

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<sup>63</sup> "The Organisation of Charity," *Illustrated Times*, Saturday January 16 1869; "Pauperism in the metropolis," *Morning Post*, Wednesday February 23 1870.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 285, 287.

<sup>65</sup> Mrs Bayly, *Ragged homes, and how to mend them* (London: James Nesbit, 1860); Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 65-69; Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 271-276.

<sup>66</sup> Jane Lewis, "The working class wife and mother and state intervention, 1870-1918," in *Labour and love: women's experience of home and family, 1850-1940*, ed. Jane Lewis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 100.

<sup>67</sup> Pamela J. Walker, "'A carnival of equality': the Salvation Army and the politics of religion in working-class communities," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5, no. 1 (2000): 60-82 (62-63); Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 65; Seth Koven, *Slumming: sexual and social politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7; Edward Salmon, "The working classes and religion," *The National Review* 11, no. 63 (1888): 330-343 (332); Mrs Adelaide Drummond,

Jones finds, however, that many East Enders did not want to be shaped in the image of one of the 50,000 Salvation Army's "slum lassies", or a "Lady Bountiful". Perhaps it was the poor's rejection of these middle-class values that caused William Booth to relate East End's depravity to that of race.<sup>68</sup>

COS funded the London City Mission Temporal Relief Fund for Poor Distressed Jews and Other Foreigners in London (which later became the East London Fund for Jews in Bishopsgate) to distribute funding to Jewish charities.<sup>69</sup> COS's 'liberalism was allergic to cultural difference'. Its evangelical Christian medical missions attempted to convert immigrant Jewish women dedicated to 'domestic Judaism' to Christianity in exchange for charity. 'Crèches and schools were run with the same conversion rationale.'<sup>70</sup> By the early 1900s, 'selectively deaf' Jewish women made use of the 12 medical missions in East London.<sup>71</sup> The Anglo-Jewish community leaders defensively endeavoured to prove their communities were worthy citizens and could assimilate into intolerant Liberal society through acculturation into good British men and women.<sup>72</sup> The Board of the Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor was formed in 1859 and became a powerful organization that funded its communities' improvement initiatives. Although it took charity for its Jewish schools,

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"Work and workers: the Salvation Army," *Time*, 18 (1888): 641-656 (642, 645, 650); Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 157.

<sup>68</sup> Pamela J. Walker, "'A carnival of equality': the Salvation Army and the politics of religion in working-class communities," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5.1 (2000) 60-79 (62-63); John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: a history of East London* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 168; Geoff Ginn, "Answering the 'Bitter Cry': urban description and social reform in the Late-Victorian East End" *The London Journal* 31, no. 2 (November 2006): 179-200 (179-200).

<sup>69</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, A/FWA/C/D257/1 19475 East End Mission to the Jews 1897-1931.

<sup>70</sup> David Feldman, "Jews in the East End, Jews in the polity. 'The Jew' in the text.." *19: interdisciplinary studies in the long nineteenth century*, 13 (2011): 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ellen Ross, "'Playing deaf': Jewish women at the medical missions of East London, 1880-1920s," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 13 (2011) 1-38 ( 1-2).

<sup>72</sup> Feldman, "Jews in the East End, Jews in the polity. 'The Jew' in the text.." 1,5-6; *Susan Tananbaum, Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (London: Routledge, 2014): chap. 1.

it kept the needy Jewish people away from the English poor law.<sup>73</sup> It even repatriated Jews who repeatedly applied for relief.<sup>74</sup>

From 1874, the Anglican organization, the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), was formed to 'benefit working women and girls of good character'. It practised class paternalism as it stressed the importance of family, monarchy and British imperialism. It encouraged the poor to emigrate.<sup>75</sup> In 1879, Baroness Angela Burnett Coutts formed the Flower Girls Brigade to teach "crippled girls" how to make artificial flowers. It later became the Watercress and Flower Girls Christian Mission. COS took it over to retrain girls to fulfil the domestic servant shortage. The image on its pamphlet of girls on crutches dancing for money attempted to conjure sympathy.<sup>76</sup> In 1883, the "Tory" Primrose League was founded to educate the upper working classes. By 1900, it had more than 1.5 million members.<sup>77</sup> As the more affluent moved out of East London, COS funded the Oxford and Toynbee Hall settlements of middle-class university men 'willing to cast in their lot with the interests of the East End' and fill the aristocratic gap.<sup>78</sup>

Rev. Samuel Barnett, previously the curate at the local church St Jude, and his wife, Henrietta, turned the settlement of Toynbee Hall into a centre of community life in East London. Henrietta involved herself in helping "fallen" young girls and

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<sup>73</sup> Feldman, "Jews in the East End, Jews in the polity. 'The Jew' in the text," 4; . Shahaf, Michal, "The Jewish Mutual Instruction Society: education for Anglo-Jewish workers, London, 1848." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 35.3. Spring (2017) 73-98

<sup>74</sup> David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, *Metropolis - London: histories and representations since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989), 12; Severin Adam Hochberg, "The repatriation of Eastern European Jews from Great Britain, 1881-1914," *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (1998): 49-62.

<sup>75</sup> "G. F. S.," *John Bull*, February 1876; "Girls Friendly Society," Friday November 2 1877; Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001). 119-120.

<sup>76</sup> Watercress and Flower Girls Mission and Flower Girl Brigade report, LMA/4305/03, A/FWA/C/D/085/003-004, London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>77</sup> "The Primrose League," *St James Gazette*, November 24 1883; Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, 120.

<sup>78</sup> "Oxford and East London," *East London Observer*, Saturday April 26 1884; Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the slums: settlements and missions in late Victorian London* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2007).

founded the Whitechapel branch of the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants (MABYS), the Guild of Hope and Pity for children, Daisy Guild for working girls and servants, and a lunchtime club to keep the factory girls off the streets. Both Henrietta and Samuel were appointed Poor Law Guardians of the Whitechapel workhouse.<sup>79</sup> Leonore Davidoff argues that attendees of these charities were ‘culture carriers’ of working-class conservatism.<sup>80</sup> However, as already seen, attendees did not necessarily embrace their ideas. Some felt wrath at the “ladies” condescension.<sup>81</sup> When Honnor Morten patronized working classes to ‘let the sunshine into our homes, whether the carpets suffer or not’, she embedded class difference.<sup>82</sup>

Although charitable gifts were often needed, such as the hospital for women by women funded by the Earl of Shaftesbury, gifts were by their very nature a representation of an imbalance of social and moral forces. The act of giving was so outside the sphere of reciprocity and mutuality that, when the gifts were not taken up, the exasperated givers further embedded the construction of outcast East London, as shown in the illustration by Antoine Valérie Bertrand in Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré’s *London, a pilgrimage to a slum* (1872) in Figure 7 below.<sup>83</sup> Many resorted to charity out of dire need, as seen in the images in Figures 8 to 10 below.

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<sup>79</sup> London, L.S.E., Toynbee Hall, *Annual reports A/TOY/005*; Micky Watkins, *Henrietta Barnett: social worker and community planner* (London: Micky Watkins and Hampstead Garden Suburb Archive Trust, 2011), 41-43.

<sup>80</sup> Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005).79; Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*. 119-120.

<sup>82</sup> Ellen Ross, *Slum travellers: ladies and London poverty, 1860-1920* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 2007), 161.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Mearns, *The bitter cry of outcast London: an inquiry in the condition of the abject poor* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1883); Ruth Smith and Deborah Valenze, "Mutuality and marginality: liberal moral theory and working class women in nineteenth century England," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13.2 (1988) 277-98 (278.)



**Figure 7: Wentworth Street, near Spitalfields and Whitechapel**

(Source: Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré)



**Figure 8: Salvation Army women's night refuge (possibly Hanbury Street in Whitechapel 1892. Taken by the Salvation Army to help raise funds from the public**

(Source: Museum of London)



**Figure 9: Salvation Army women's night refuge, Hanbury Street, Whitechapel 1890.** Above the beds is the inscription 'ARE YOU READY TO DIE?'

(Source: Museum of London)



**Figure 10: Queue of homeless Londoners outside the Medland Hall, shelter for destitute Londoners in Stepney 1900**

(Source: Museum of London)

John Hollingshead, angered at the wretchedness and starvation in East London, criticized 'babbling' Parliament and 'tinkering' philanthropists, who endeavoured 'to alleviate the divisions of 'poverty, ignorance, dirt, immorality and crime'.<sup>84</sup> These divisions became synonymous with its non-English incomers. In 1855, Watts Phillips characterized East London's labour geographies' communities as 'wild tribes', with the docklands characterized as home to the African sailors and dock workers, the Limehouse with Chinese opium dens, Whitechapel with Jewish

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<sup>84</sup> John Hollingshead, *Ragged London in 1861* (London: Dent, 1861), vi, 8; John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: a history of East London* (New Haven, C.T.; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 162.

tailors, St Giles with the Irish, and Canning Town with Indians.<sup>85</sup> As incomers crowded residential areas, the local streets and winding rookeries gained notorious reputations where people lived on average 40 persons per house and 12 persons per room.<sup>86</sup> The Church Pastoral Aid Society believed them so dangerous that 'a solitary policeman dare not venture' into them.<sup>87</sup>

Between 1830 and 1880, approximately 100,000 residents were displaced as land was cleared for roads, trainlines and new industrial and residential areas. In 1840, 3,000 homes were demolished to allow the London and Blackwell Railways to connect Poplar, Stepney and Bow.<sup>88</sup> As the homeless were forced to 'herd like swine' into already crowded 'fever-haunts', some asked, 'What shall we do with our thieves?'<sup>89</sup> The Earl of Shaftesbury and Robert Benton Seeley came to the aid of the displaced homeless. They set up the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes to provide sanitary accommodation for deserving poor workers. Rents were calculated to yield a fair return and it was such a worthy cause that Prince Albert became its President. MP Jacob Bright questioned Lord Ashley's hypocritical philanthropy when he asked why he allowed those who laboured on his rural estates to live in 'squalid penury'.<sup>90</sup>

Other philanthropists followed Ashley's profitable lead in housing provision. During the late 1890s, Baroness Angela Burnett-Coutts paid for the slum, the Old Nichol, in Bethnal Green to be replaced by the Boundary Estate to provide homes for

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<sup>85</sup> Watts Phillips, *The Wild Tribes of London* (London, Ward & Lock, 1855), in John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: a history of East London* (New Haven, C.T.; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 151, 161.

<sup>86</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 210.

<sup>87</sup> "Church Pastoral Aid Society," *Derby Mercury*, Wednesday October 29 1862, 2, accessed February 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>88</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 62.

<sup>89</sup> "What shall we do with our thieves," *Weekly Despatch* (London, England), Sunday June 12 1870; "The Artizan and Dwellings Bill," *Eastbourne Gazette*, Wednesday March 24 1875, accessed February 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>90</sup> *Globe*, Saturday Mar 16 1844, 2; "Lord Ashley's philanthropy," *Gloucester Journal*, Saturday May 11 1844; "The Society for Improving the condition of the Labouring Classes," *Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Thursday August 16 1849.

the deserving poor who guaranteed a good rent. The Old Nichol was home to the poorest, with Irish, Jewish and other nationalities living and working cheek by jowl. Burnett-Coutts did not consider that the Old Nichol's residents worked in their 'insanitary houses' and street workshops.<sup>91</sup> The extract in Figure 11 below from Booth's map of East London shows that the Old Nichol was close to the economic epicentres between Columbia Road and Bethnal Green Road. Booth identified a range of incomes within the area. He classed the majority of families as: Class A ('vicious, semi-criminal' families); Class B (very poor families in casual chronic want); and Class C (families who survived on 18s. to 21s. a week). However, close by, the main pink arteries along the thoroughfares indicate the residential areas where the fairly comfortable Class E lived on good ordinary earnings. The red lines are indicative of the comfortable middle class: Class F.



**Figure 11: The Old Nichol, Bethnal Green, extracted from Charles Booth's *Map Descriptive of London Poverty 1898-1899*. Sheet 5: East Central District**

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

The Old Nichol's residents were forced to overspill into the surrounding areas further from the economic epicentres. In 1898, the Women's Settlement of Bethnal Green

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<sup>91</sup> "Insanitary houses," *Hackney & Kingsland Gazette*, Wednesday November 28 1883; "There can be no question that much of the insanitary condition..." *Hackney & Kingsland Gazette*, Wednesday October 17 1883; Sarah Wise, *The blackest streets: the life and death of a Victorian slum* (London: Vintage, 2009), 256.

not only paid a good rent to live in the Boundary Estate, but it also improved the area's reputation.<sup>92</sup>

Philanthropy was a political act in that it protected class privilege. A. J. Kidd sees the donor-recipient relationship as a gift economy and a microcosm of a market economy.<sup>93</sup> A philanthropic workers' self-help initiative was a 'treader' on others.<sup>94</sup> As Hollingshead suggested, the poor had to 'learn to help themselves', but religious and racial bigotry excluded most from the better parts of the labour market, economy and wider society. In protection of themselves, the racialized incomers embedded themselves in their communities' politics, religions and cultures.<sup>95</sup> As their middle-class community leaders founded their churches and self-help initiatives, Sarah Williams argues that the urban working poor were exposed to a range of religious beliefs and secularism.<sup>96</sup> While some assimilated or incorporated themselves in the host English society, others did not. As Daniel Williams notes, the notion of positional pluralism aptly describes nineteenth-century East London.<sup>97</sup>

### **Irish labour geographies**

As Thomas Beames wrote in 1850, 'hordes of Irish who annually seem to come in and out with flies and fruit', had 'colonised East London'.<sup>98</sup> Many found it

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<sup>92</sup> "Women's Settlement for Bethnal Green," *Woman's Signal*, Thursday May 12 1898.

<sup>93</sup> A. J. Kidd, "Philanthropy and the 'social history paradigm'," *Social History* 21, no. 2 (1996): 81, 186.

<sup>94</sup> Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50.3 (2017) 585-618 (593)

<sup>95</sup> Hollingshead, *Ragged London in 1861*, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Peter D. Thomas, "Refiguring the subaltern," *Political Theory* 04 (2018): 1-24 (4); Pamela J. Walker, "'A carnival of equality': the Salvation Army and the politics of religion in working-class communities," 62.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel R. Williams, "Making sense of 'place': reflections on pluralism and positionality in place research," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 131 (2014): 74-82 (74 abstract).

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Beames, *The Rookeries of London: past, present and prospective* (London: T. Bosworth, 1850), 26; "The rookeries of London," *Morning Chronicle*, Saturday 6 April 1850; "Irish colonisation in the metropolis," *John Bull*, October Monday 21 1850, 665 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> accessed February 16 2021.

hard to achieve success and were denied the support of the Poor Law.<sup>99</sup> The Irish were homogeneously stereotyped as criminal.<sup>100</sup> Many made their homes in the worst winding rookeries.<sup>101</sup> Beames opined that 'rookeries are bad, but what are they to Irish rookeries'.<sup>102</sup> Journalist Henry Mayhew found large Irish enclaves in Rosemary Lane, Whitechapel, St George in the East and Stepney and St Giles.<sup>103</sup> In 1851, the labyrinthine slum area of St Giles Rookery was home to the largest Irish community. It was 'one of the foulest places in London' and it became worse with human overflows as land was cleared.<sup>104</sup> Beames found 'abandoned' women 'without shoes or stockings – a babe perhaps at the breast, with a single garment confined to the waist by a bit of string wandering through the rookery'. They lived in houses so full that they 'promiscuously' laid with strangers in cheaper double beds and 'gin is sold to them a penny a quartern'. In Shoreditch, Beames found 70 men and women living in two small houses.<sup>105</sup> His portrayal of squalid Irish life in the rookery so typified East London's reputation that it became a slummers' destination.

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<sup>99</sup> Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard, Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, "The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913", accessed March 24 2012, [www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0.

<sup>100</sup> Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, "Irish identities in Victorian Britain," *Immigrants and Minorities* 27, no. 2/3 (2009): 132.

<sup>101</sup> Beames, *The Rookeries of London: past, present and prospective*, 26; "The rookeries of London," *Morning Chronicle*, Saturday 6 April 1850; "Irish colonisation in the metropolis," *John Bull*, Monday 21 October 1850, 665, accessed February 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Kirkland, "Reading the rookery: the social meaning of an Irish slum in nineteenth century London," *New Hibernia Review* 16.1 (2012) 16-30 (16)

<sup>103</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 189, Jacqueline Turton, "Mayhew's Irish: the poor in the mid nineteenth century London," in *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the local dimension*, ed. Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 1999) 122-155 (128-130); Lara Marks, "Working wives and working mothers: a comparative study of Irish and East European Jewish married women's work and motherhood in East London, 1870-1914," In "Irish Studies Centre Occasional Paper Series," (1990) 4

<sup>104</sup> Kirkland, "Reading the rookery: the social meaning of an Irish slum in nineteenth century London," 16.

<sup>105</sup> Beames, *The Rookeries of London: past, present and prospective*, chap. 3, 19-33; Seth Koven, *Slumming: sexual and social politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004), Introduction, 1-21; Sarah Wise and Ken Worpole, *Doctor Barnardo in the East End of London*, (Bishopsgate Institute). Podcast uploaded March 11 2015, accessed April 1 2019, <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/audios.aspx?vid=9623>.

William Pollard-Urquhart's research during the 1860s, and journalist Hugh Heinrick's 1872 survey of the Irish in England would have refuted Beames' degradation of Irish women. Instead, they found many Irish families composed of 3.7 persons supported on male breadwinner wages. Many were dockers, and some were skilled or white-collar workers who may have taken in boarders.<sup>106</sup> Between 1851 and 1871, many Irish women were domestic servants, until they found work in the low-paid, unskilled slop trades, such as fur pulling or finishing items, like umbrellas and artificial flowers. Many also undertook laundry work or became costerwomen. Heinrick believed Irish costerwomen 'chaste' and 'very seldom formed any connexion without the sanction of the marriage tie'.<sup>107</sup> Heinrick acknowledged Irish poverty. He blamed the pubs for the 'amount of acquired vice, which has been nurtured in, and is fed by drunkenness, and what is still worse, the vice is nearly as common with the women as the men. The result is very deplorable'.<sup>108</sup> Yet 30,000 went to hear an Irish priest advocate temperance.<sup>109</sup> During the 1890s, John Denver found that the Irish fortune had regressed. Unskilled Irish Cockneys worked in manual trades, Irishwomen costermongers still sold in the streets and many young Irishwomen worked as sweated needlewomen.<sup>110</sup>

The Irish experience in 1840s' East London drove many to become Chartists. Although some joined benefit societies and unions, it was not until 1871 that the male workers joined the general union, the Labour Protection League.<sup>111</sup> While some

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<sup>106</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin : Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 120; Mervyn Busted, "Resistance and respectability: dilemmas of Irish migrant politics in Victorian Britain," *Immigrants and Minorities* 27, nos. 2/3 (2009): 178-193 (178-179).

<sup>107</sup> Hugh Heinrick, *Study of the Irish in London* (London; Hambledon Press, 1872; 1990), 27; Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 108; Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 94-95.

<sup>108</sup> Heinrick, *Study of the Irish in London*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin : Irish migrants in Victorian London*, 208-209.

<sup>110</sup> John Denver, *The Irish in Britain from the earliest times to fall and death of Parnell* (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Truber, 1894), chap. XLI, 389-393; Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin : Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 94-95.

<sup>111</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin : Irish migrants in Victorian London.*, 224-243.

Irish were supportive of home rule in Ireland, many endeavoured to incorporate themselves into English society, causing Heinrich to fear that they would forget their Irish ways.<sup>112</sup> The Irish community delineated along politics. Roman Catholics tended to support Conservatives, while those who supported home rule tended to be Liberals, and trade unionists tended to be Marxists.<sup>113</sup> However, as Stedman Jones notes, and this thesis shows, the Irish from across the political spectrum supported working-class Marxist trade unionist, John Burns.<sup>114</sup> By the 1880s, Irish labour geographies were very active in the labour movement. The largely Irish match women's strike initiated new unionism in 1888, and thereafter Irish women became central to East London's working-class labour movement.<sup>115</sup>

Anne McClintock's analysis of Heinrich's survey shows racial, gender and class stereotypes of the female Irish worker in the metropole with Irish domestic servants being positioned as 'non-white'.<sup>116</sup> Bronwen Walter finds both the Irish and Jewish communities were placed outside of the boundaries of the English nation and that within their communities women and men were located in different social and class positions.<sup>117</sup> Lara Marks notes the parallels in Irish and Jewish women's double burden as mothers and workers.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Mary Hickman, "Alternative historiographies of the Irish in Britain: a critique of the segregation/assimilation model," in *The Irish in Victorian Britain: the local dimension*, ed. Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 236-253 (240-243); John Hutchinson and Alan O'Day, "The Gaelic revival in London, 1900-22: limits to ethnic identity," in *The Irish in Victorian Britain*, ed. Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 254-276 (255-256); Mervyn Busted, "Resistance and respectability: dilemmas of Irish migrant politics in Victorian Britain," *Immigrants and Minorities* 27.2/3 (2009) 178-93 (178).

<sup>113</sup> Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor: the East End of London, 1885-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004), 112, 219; Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London*, 237.

<sup>114</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 348.

<sup>115</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London*, 237, 241.

<sup>116</sup> Mervyn Busted, "Resistance and respectability: dilemmas of Irish migrant politics in Victorian Britain," *Immigrants and Minorities* 178-179; Bronwen Walter, "Strangers on the inside: Irish women servants in England, 1881," *Immigrants and Minorities* 27, nos. 2/3 (2009): 279-299 (295).

<sup>117</sup> Bronwen Walter, "Whiteness and diasporic Irishness: nation, gender and class," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 9 (2011): 1296.

<sup>118</sup> Marks, *Working wives and working mothers: a comparative study of Irish and East European Jewish married women's work and motherhood in East London, 1870-1914*.

## Jewish labour geographies

During the 1840s, approximately one-third of the 20,000 Jews in London were middle class and the rest were lower class. Despite many working in the skilled professions of making cabinets, shoes, tailored clothes and watches, one-third of the Anglo-Jewish community depended upon welfare.<sup>119</sup> As Booth's map shows, and Raymond Kalman states, Jewish East London was the area of Tower of Hamlets, which included the infamous "Jewish Ghetto" of Whitechapel. Other Jewish labour geographies were in Spitalfields, Ratcliffe, Shadwell, Wapping, Mile End and Limehouse.<sup>120</sup> To uphold its community's respectability, the *Jewish Chronicle* denied their community's poverty and stated that Jewish women did not work. In fact, Jewish women had always worked in their mother countries: 70% of a settlement were skilled artisan needlewomen. Yet, between 1891 and 1911, between 65% and 70% of Russian and Russian-Polish women in Hackney appeared on the census as 'unspecified' or 'unoccupied'.<sup>121</sup> By 1911, 80% of 15- to 25-year-old Jewish women mostly worked in the clothing trades.<sup>122</sup> By this point, Jewish female workers were also prevalent in the upholstery and furniture polishing trade.<sup>123</sup>

Although the Jewish community voted for Liberal MP Samuel Montagu from 1855 to 1900 and then for his nephew, Stuart Montagu, from 1900 to 1916, radical

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<sup>119</sup> Stephen Jankiewicz, "A dangerous class: the street sellers of nineteenth-century London," *Journal of Social History* 46. 2 (2012): 391-415 (394-399); Michal Shahal, "The Jewish Mutual Instruction Society: education for Anglo-Jewish workers, 1848," *Shofar: an interdisciplinary journal of Jewish Studies* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2107): 177.

<sup>120</sup> Phyllis Lassner and Mia Spiro, "A tale of two cities: Virginia Woolfe's imagined Jewish spaces and London's East End Jewish Culture," *Woolf Studies Annual* 19 (2013): 64.

<sup>121</sup> Susan Tananbaum, *Jewish immigrants in London, 1880-1939*, (London: Routledge, 2014) 150.

<sup>122</sup> Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman's cause: the Jewish woman's movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 109.

<sup>123</sup> William I. Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade* (London: The Jewish Museum in association with The Geffrye Museum, 1997), 8-17; Women's Industrial Council, "Women's Industrial News, March 1902," in *Furnishing the World: the East London Furniture Trade, 1830-1980*, ed. Pat Kirkham (London: JourneymanPress, 1987).

elements radiated from Berner Street and Sidney Street.<sup>124</sup> Mayhew noted that men, women and children of all cultural backgrounds worked as costermongers. Perhaps it was their independence and vulnerability that made Mayhew perceive them a 'dangerous' class that radicalized the streets they walked.<sup>125</sup> Costermongering gave the most vulnerable independence. However, costergirls' lives were as severe as those of boys. They left home early in the morning for the markets and sold in the streets until nine at night.<sup>126</sup> As the prosopography will reveal, Irish and Jewish women's poverty drove their political participation in the labour and suffrage movements.<sup>127</sup> As seen in Figure 12 below, Jewish life was in the streets.

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<sup>124</sup> David Feldman, "Jews in the East End, Jews in the polity. 'The Jew' in the text," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 13 (2011): 1-4.; W. J. Fishman, *East End Jewish radicals 1875-1914* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2004), 153; Ben Peter Gidley, "Citizenship and belonging: East London Jewish radicals, 1903-1918" (Goldsmith College, University of London, 2003) 64-78.

<sup>125</sup> Stephen Jankiewicz, "A dangerous class: the street sellers of nineteenth-century London," 394-399; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, 44, 41-55; Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 130; Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 62.

<sup>126</sup> Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, 20; Stephen Jankiewicz, "A dangerous class: the street sellers of nineteenth-century London," 407.

<sup>127</sup> Susan Tananbaum, "Democratizing British-Jewish philanthropy: the Union of Jewish Women (1902-1930)," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 20 (2010): 57-79 (58); Kuzmack, *Woman's cause: the Jewish woman's movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990).44-51.



**Figure 12: A crowd of market traders and locals in Middlesex Street, East London 1899.** The photograph was taken by an amateur photographer with an interest in London street life and immigrant districts, such as the Jewish area around Middlesex Street, which runs between Liverpool Street Station and Aldgate

(Source: Museum of London)

## Conclusion

In exploring the integral state's political and civil societies' constructs of women workers' experience, it is possible to identify the geometrics of oppression responsible for the creation of their marginalized lowness. As East London's economy morphed through its different economic phases, women's labour was ubiquitous, with most women learning their industrial skills on the job as they flexibly worked in different trades.<sup>128</sup> The sweated industries, trades and workers became intricately spatially and temporally synchronized between homes, streets, workshops and factories. Casual and seasonal wages reduced as employers struggled to keep their trades and businesses afloat. The skilled and better paid male workers found themselves increasingly forced to undertake women's work in low-paid unskilled trades.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labor and Working Class History* 64 (Fall 2003): 112-138 (112).

<sup>129</sup> Jane Rendall, *Women in an industrializing society: England 1750-1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 5, 7.

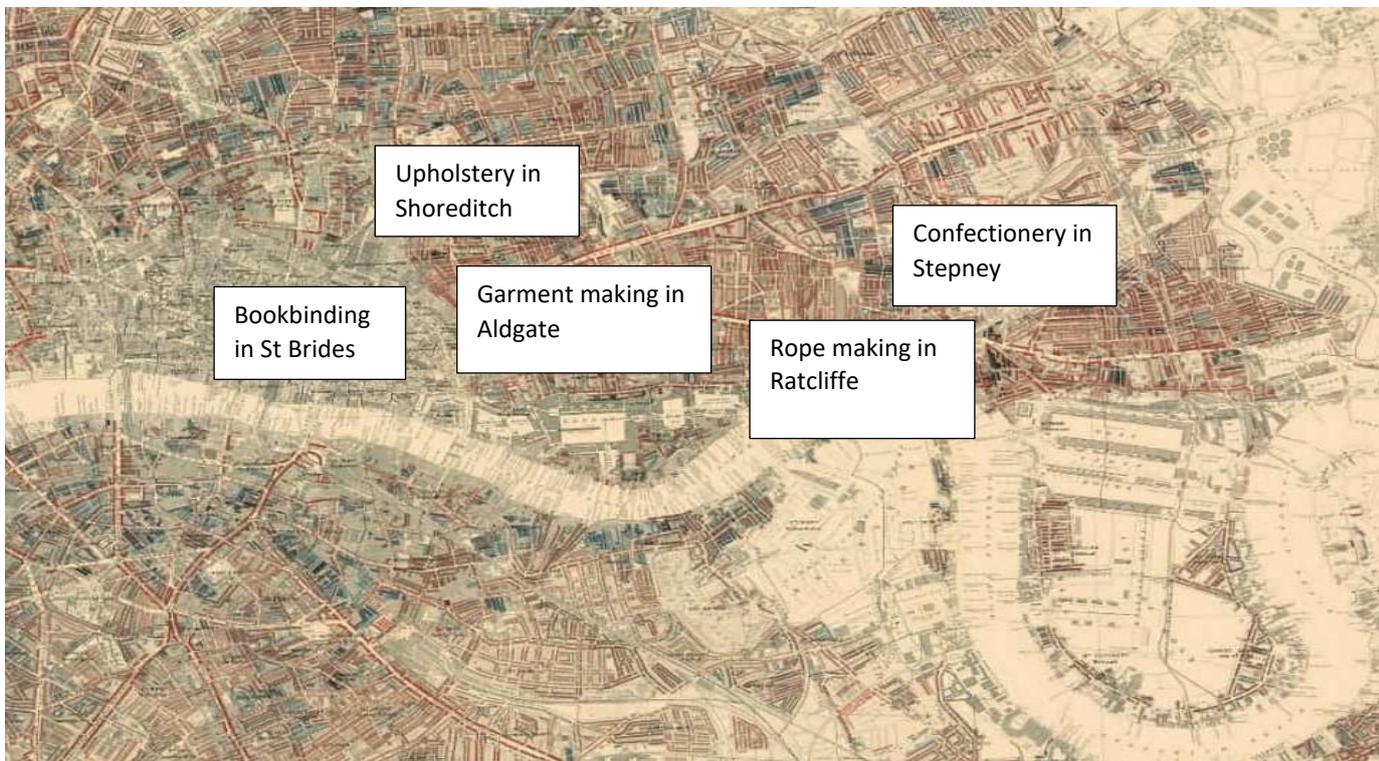
East London's economy initially centred around disparate sites of manufacturing, but as capitalists and employers expanded East London's industrial-built environment, it became a centre of small-scale workshop production and subsidiary trades that operated alongside factories and the docks. Residential areas became sites of homework and small workshops. The closer people could afford to live to the economic epicentres that radiated from the larger sites of employment, such as the factories, the docks and the main thoroughfares, the more likely they were to find better employment opportunities. As workers chased employment, they developed their lives around East London's physical landscape. As skilled incomers set up trades or joined established ones, the unskilled formed the ranks of the casual workers. Given that male workers were more likely to be at least semi-skilled, women formed the largest unskilled group in the labour force. In some poorer streets, single women or female heads of households may have been the dominant demographic.

When journalists and social investigators, such as Thomas Beames, represented working-class women as degraded, they cemented ideas of outcast London in the minds of the middle class. The state, as represented by philanthropists, the Earl of Shaftesbury and Baroness Burnett Coutts, was both benefactor and beneficiary of the capitalist system. Philanthropic organizations' protection of women workers upheld workers' reputation of outcasts because it ensured a supply of trained cheap servants and workers. As the wealthy lived off the profits created by sweated workers, local trades became reliant upon women workers. Although historian Sheila Rowbotham does not wish an analysis of patriarchal capitalism to reduce women's lives to their waged work, and therefore their biology, the evidence suggests that employers used women's biology to constrain their wages, and the integral state to constrain their lives. However, the same evidence also shows that women workers manifested their resilient volition to be creative; even entrepreneurial.

## Chapter 3: Sweated women workers in bookbinding, upholstery, garment making, confectionery and ropemaking

### Introduction

This chapter documents women workers' industrial and male trade union experience in the developing trades of bookbinding, upholstery, garment making, confectionery and ropemaking. The map in Figure 13 below shows the locations of the trades in East London and the spatial industrial interdependence between factories, workshops, streets and homes.



**Figure 13: Map of East London's trades: upholstery, confectionery, garment making, ropemaking and bookbinding located on Booth's map of London**

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

### Bookbinding

By the 1840s, printing and bookbinding were expanding trades. The abolition of stamp duty, paper tax and increasing literacy encouraged its development. By



was formed in 1823 and, during the 1860s, its members met in Farringdon.<sup>3</sup> The trade's hierarchical organization of its labour saw mostly male compositors at its aristocratic pinnacle, and bookbinding and folding at its base. From the 1840s, bookbinding became increasingly dependent upon sweated women workers. Ramsey MacDonald's research of the 1841 census shows that in London there were approximately 2,035 women were either an employer or employee in bookbinding and bookselling.<sup>4</sup> Given the respectability of bookbinding, it could be assumed that most bookbinders and folders would have admitted their occupations to the census recorders, so these figures should reflect the reality. The trade remained largely unmechanized until the linotype machine came into being in 1884.<sup>5</sup> By 1871, although London's printing industry had reduced as provincial printing works were developing, it was still a large industry. It employed 70,000 metropolitan workers, and most bookbinders were women.<sup>6</sup>

Lord Ashley and Richard Dugard Grainger clearly stated their approval of bookbinding as respectable female work in the 1842-1843 Children's Employment Commission.<sup>7</sup> Its sewing element characterized it as honourable women's work. Grainger revealed that bookbinder Messrs Collier & Son of Hatton Garden maintained respectable standards because, as the forewoman had informed him, only those who had conducted themselves properly were kept on after their apprenticeships had finished. Even at less respectable premises, women and men

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Rogers, "The art of bookbinding" in Frank Wallis Galton, *Workers on their industries* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896), 141,145; London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, *Vellum Binders Society, Minute box 6 4 Jan 1892-23 Dec 1901*. (London: Vellum Binders Society); London Metropolitan University, TUC Library Bookbinders Consolidated Union: *London Branch Minutes 21 July 1867-6 June 1882*.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsey James MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, (London: P. S. King & Son, 1904) 3-7.

<sup>5</sup> Felicity Hunt, "Opportunities lost and gained: mechanisation and women's work in the London bookbinding and printing trades," . In *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918*, edited by Angela Johns (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) Chap. 2 71-93 (73)

<sup>6</sup> Jerry White, *London in the nineteenth century: 'a human awful wonder of God'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 234.

<sup>7</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 34.

were kept apart. Female learners often undertook the 'more common part of the work'.<sup>8</sup> Ramsey MacDonald found that most bookbinders were paper folders. Whilst some girls followed their parents or other relatives into the trade, it was a trade the unskilled could enter. George Dodd's *Days at the Factory* (1843) examined the working conditions of the largest London bookbinder in London: Messrs Westley and Clark. Its 200 women folders and sewers' wages ranged from 10s to 18s per week. A small number of girls were taken on as learners. After two years, at the age of 14, they became journeywomen.<sup>9</sup> Figure 15 below reflects the respectable genteel image of a woman bookbinder.



**Figure 15: Women bookbinder at Westley and Clarks.** Engraving by Trimbell in *The Penny Magazine* 1842, 379

(Source: Mary Evans Picture Library)

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<sup>8</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 34-39.

<sup>9</sup> George Dodd, *Days at the factories; or, The manufacturing industry of Great Britain described, and illustrated by numerous engravings of machines and processes. Series I.- London* (London: C. Knight & Co., 1843), 363-386; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 34-39.

During the 1840s and 1850s, trade unionist Thomas Dunning did not find such genteel working conditions. Bookbinding was indeed a hazardous trade, as indicated by bookbinders' high premature mortality rate as noted in obituaries printed in *The Bookbinders' Trade Circular*.<sup>10</sup> Dunning noted in 1845 that the largest contractor was the Southwark Society and that it mostly employed outworker bookbinders, who worked in their dusty and poorly ventilated homes. In East London, most lived in the poorer residential parishes, including St Bride.<sup>11</sup> Their wages ranged from just over 3d to 10d per week. As such wages only afforded a poor diet, most were malnourished.<sup>12</sup> During the trades' depressions in 1848 and 1855, the employment of younger girls increased.<sup>13</sup> However, not all employers were deemed exploitative. In 1850, Dunning recognized the 'excellent' bookbinder employer Mrs Norman's 'attention to the health and safety of her employees' in her obituary.<sup>14</sup> In 1898, bookbinder trade unionist Eleanor Whyte recognized how her employer ensured that employees could earn wages after its premises had burned down.<sup>15</sup>

One apprentice, Sarah Sweetman, described to the Children's Commission how gendered apprenticeships were. The better houses only apprenticed boys and they were able to learn the whole trade for £25 over seven years. Girls were apprenticed for a period of 9 months to 2 years and paid a 'small premium of two guineas to remunerate the forewoman' for her instruction time. If 'thoroughly taught the business' a girl 'generally could command profitable employment'.<sup>16</sup> Employers

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<sup>10</sup> "Deaths England & Wales 1837-2007, East London," vol. 1c, 18, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>; T. J. Dunning, "Obituary Mary Zugg," *Bookbinders' Trade Circular* 3, January 21 1862.

<sup>11</sup> "Appendix to first bound volume of The Bookbinders' trade circular", *The Bookbinders' Trade Circular* (1850).

<sup>12</sup> MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*. Appendices VI-V; Melissa Score, "Social Progress?: Gender and Technology in British Printing Trade Union Journals 1840-1865," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47.2 (2014) 274-295 (279).

<sup>13</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, London Consolidated Lodge of Journeymen Bookbinders: *Minutes box 8 1866-1868 June 3, 1867*. 347 NRA 24409.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Dunning, "Mrs Norman [Obituary]", *Bookbinders' Trade Circular*, 150.

<sup>15</sup> Eleanor Whyte, "Generous employers," *The Englishwoman's review of social and industrial questions* 29, no. 238 (July 15 1898).

<sup>16</sup> Hunt, "Opportunities lost and gained: mechanisation and women's work in the London bookbinding and printing trades," 74.

endeavoured to attract female workers with their advertisements for 'respectable' girl apprentices, female bookbinders and forewomen.<sup>17</sup> The Society for Promoting Employment of Women (SPEW) and Emily Faithful's Employment Bureau advertised bookbinding to their middle-class women job applicants.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps its respectability is why, in 1861, 81% of bookbinders were London born.<sup>19</sup> Despite the numbers of women bookbinders, male workers did not feel the same antagonism towards them as they did towards the small minority of skilled female compositors. Male workers' felt that their skilled work was protected, because women bookbinders' training and employment was restricted to certain sub-divided processes.<sup>20</sup>

However, MacDonald found that in smaller workplaces "job hands" undertook all the intricate processes. Great sheets of paper were distributed to thousands of workers to be folded by hand or machine. A female paper folder fed the machine, sometimes four times, and then cut the paper with a knife. She then gathered the papers for each "signature" from contents to index and placed her mark of responsibility. The sheets were then fanned out, glued or sewn. In larger premises, each process was undertaken by different hands. Stitching machinery varied with the technique implemented.<sup>21</sup> As one woman attended the machine, another woman cut the books apart when they came out. Magazines and pamphlets were often wrapped. End papers were placed in bound books. Other processes included nipping the backs, backing, lettering and "opening-up" to check for flaws. Old books often needed skilled re-binding and repairing. "Foxed" pages were cleaned with acid and re-sized. Other processes included numbering, paging, lithography, envelope-making, cameo stamping, show-card mounting, type founding and vellum binding.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Morning Advertiser*, Monday January 2 1854.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women" (PhD University of Gloucestershire, 2003), 64-70; *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, ed. Emily Faithful (London: Victorian Press, 1874-1876).

<sup>19</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, (London, Verso, 2013), 137.

<sup>20</sup> MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 3-7.

<sup>21</sup> MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 10-16.

<sup>22</sup> MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 10-16.

During the 1890s, MacDonald found that the majority of bookbinding was undertaken by regularly employed women, unless extra help was required in the form of “job” or “grass hands”. This implies the work was not necessarily seasonal. Bookbinder Eleanor Whyte and her sister and parents worked for the same employers for long periods.<sup>23</sup> Between 1885 and 1900, as the trade depressed and wages fluctuated, employers positively encouraged female employment. At one exhibition, Mr Felt taught between 25 and 30 young girls to use his new typesetting machine that combined letters. Felt was a ‘warm supporter of trade unions’, but he took issue with them when stated that machines cheapened work. He argued instead that machines created more jobs. Felt added that he would, of course, cooperate with the Printers’ Society, but that women ‘should not be excluded’.<sup>24</sup> In 1893, nervous male trades unions, without consulting women bookbinders, drew up an agreement with the Bookbinding Trade Section of the London Chamber of Commerce, which stated ‘no man would lose their work to a woman’.<sup>25</sup> The agreement stipulated that only six processes could be undertaken by women or unskilled labour. It also specified men’s rates of pay for work done after ‘it left women’.<sup>26</sup>

In 1901, despite this protection of male workers, MacDonald found men and women undertaking some of the same processes. Married women were still predominately working in bookbinding.<sup>27</sup> Despite its low wages, increasingly ladies of leisure, alongside those seeking an industrial skill to earn a respectable wage, aspired to learn bookbinding from the best. The renowned female bookbinder, Sarah

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<sup>23</sup> HO17, England, Wales & Scotland 1841 census, 1851, RG10 England, Wales & Scotland 1871 census, RG12 England, Wales & Scotland 1891 census, accessed September 6 2016, <http://search.findmypast.co.uk>; "Miss Eleanor Whyte," *The Times* (London, England), March 31 1914.

<sup>24</sup> "Women in the printing trade," *Manchester Weekly Times*, Saturday December 18 1869; MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 134; Appendix VII.

<sup>25</sup> MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> "Women in the printing trade," *Manchester Weekly Times*, Saturday December 18 1869; MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, 134; Appendix VII.

Trevelyan Prideaux (1853-1933), gave classes to an acclaimed standard.<sup>28</sup> From 1893, men could undertake technical classes at the People's Palace, Mile End. It was only in 1898 that women could learn at the respectable and prestigious Chiswick School of Arts & Crafts in Bedford Place. The Salvation Army also set up a workshop in Hackney to teach bookbinding to "rescued" women unsuitable for domestic service. Some of these rescued women then set up workshops to print prospectuses and took on pupils themselves.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Guild of Women Bookbinders were highlighting their skills through exhibitions.<sup>30</sup> Women bookbinders skills can be seen today in many different printed materials in special collections. Chapter 5 will track the agency of women bookbinders' trade unionism from 1840 to 1874, and the subsequent chapters will reveal women bookbinders' influence upon the formation of the labour movement.

## Upholstery

Britain's furniture trade became increasingly reliant upon the British Empire for its wood and its export market.<sup>31</sup> Male unions held a stranglehold on the furniture trade and were intransigent in keeping women workers out. Women were only permitted in its soft genteel element of upholstery. The needlework involved defined it as unskilled women's work. Upholstery was only a job for men who had 'no strength to spare'.<sup>32</sup> Journalist Henry Mayhew noted that most upholsterers were 'old maids' and widows of upholsterers who mostly cut out cheaper chintz, Holland cases

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<sup>28</sup> 'Mrs Sarah Prideaux,' *The Queen* (London, England). Saturday September 6 1890. 300; Marianne Tidcombe, *Women bookbinders, 1880-1920*, (New Castle, Del.: Old Knoll Press, 1996) 158.

<sup>29</sup> Tidcombe, *Women bookbinders, 1880-1920*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> *Catalogue of the First Exhibition of Bookbinding by Women ... Held ... by arrangement with Messrs. Karlake & Co. [With plates.]*, (London: Karlake & Co., 1898).

<sup>31</sup> William I Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade*, (London: The Jewish Museum in association with The Geffrye Museum, 1997). 5; Pat Kirkham, Rodney Mace and Julia Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980* (London: Journeyman, 1987), 11.

<sup>32</sup> Joanna Smith and Ray Rogers, *Behind the veneer: the South Shoreditch furniture trade and its buildings* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006), 34.

for seats or worked as stuffers on pitiful wages.<sup>33</sup> Yet, carpet sewer and trade unionist, Jeanette Wilkinson, did not find the work “soft.” Her finger joints would hurt so much that she struggled to write.<sup>34</sup> Trade unionist Elizabeth Mears, her sister and her parents thought that it was a ‘good’ trade and that her mother’s skill was renowned.<sup>35</sup> The work was not as monotonous as in other trades and its wages were often better. As the trade quickly expanded, there was a high demand for skilled workers and so it was possible for learners to progress to expert level. Skilled work can be seen in retail and exhibition catalogues of upholstered furniture.<sup>36</sup>

During the 1840s, the furniture trade was clearly delineated between its honourable branch in the West End and its dishonourable branch in the East End. During the 1850s, Mayhew calculated that approximately 600 to 700 workers were paid standardized wages in the West End’s honourable sector, whereas approximately 4,000 to 5,000 workers’ wages were determined by competition in the East End’s dishonourable sector. Mayhew found sweaters who employed poor ‘garret masters’ in Spitalfields and Bethnal Green, whose families and cheap apprentices made cheap furniture to sell in the furniture ‘slaughterhouse’ warehouses.<sup>37</sup> As the furniture trade expanded, the number of upholstery shops increased, with approximately 220 in the West End in 1859.<sup>38</sup> Nearly one-fifth of

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<sup>33</sup> “Henry Mayhew, Letter IX,” *Morning Chronicle*, November 16 1849, in Smith and Rogers, *Behind the veneer: the South Shoreditch furniture trade and its buildings* (Swindon: English Heritage, 1987), 35; Pat Kirkham, Rodney Mace and Julia Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980* (London: Journeyman, 1987), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Miss Eliza Orme, "Obituary Miss Jeanette Wilkinson," *Manchester Times*, 1524, Saturday September 25 1886; June Hannan, "Jeannette Gaury Wilkinson (1841-1886)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed March 19 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50738>.

<sup>35</sup> "Miss Mears [obituary]," *The Women's Trade Union Review* 17 (April 1 1895).

<sup>36</sup> Pat Kirkham, Rodney Mace and Julia Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980*, (London: Journeyman, 1987).44, 46, 52-54.

<sup>37</sup> Reid, *The furniture makers: a history of trade unionism in the furniture trade, 1865-1972*, (Oxford: Malthouse, 1986).15-16.

<sup>38</sup> John Leonard Oliver, *The Development and structure of the furniture industry* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1966), 85.

upholsterers lived in the slum, the Old Nichol, in Bethnal Green.<sup>39</sup> By 1870, Curtain Road, East London, was superseding the West End as the larger furniture making area.<sup>40</sup> Although its large windows displaying ready-made furniture created an air of affluence, upholstery was undertaken on tight profit margins. Wood merchants, sawmills and small workshops were located in nearby Bethnal Green, or further east in Limehouse, where Booth's researchers found the poorest families lived.<sup>41</sup>

In 1874, the Labour Commissioner noted that the trade 'has its light and dark shade'. In the West End, women upholsterers excelled in several branches and were correspondingly remunerated. Upholstery learners in the West End earned between 8s and 10s per week in comfortable working conditions. East London's sweaters paid women upholsterers 5s to 6s per week, and the labour was 'devilish'.<sup>42</sup> It is in this context that Chapter 6 documents women upholsterers' unionization. Figures 16 and 17 below provide an illustration and a map, respectively, of Curtain Road.



**Figure 16: Images of the carts and facades of furniture workshops in Curtain Road c1900**

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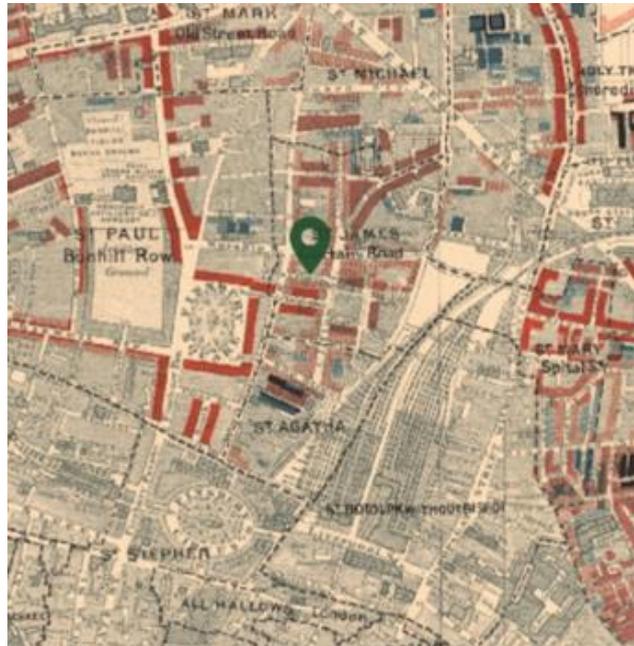
<sup>39</sup> Sarah Wise, *The blackest streets: the life and death of a Victorian slum* (London: Vintage, 2009), 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> Kirkham, Mace and Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980*, 15; Oliver, *The Development and structure of the furniture industry*, 43.

<sup>41</sup> Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 26 (November 28 1874): 3.

(Source: Hackney Archive)



**Figure 17: Curtain Road, near Spitalfields,** extracted from Booth's *Map Descriptive of London Poverty 1898-1899*: Sheet 5: East Central District

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

Booth's map indicates the socio-economics of Curtain Road and the surrounding streets. Families who lived in the closest streets were 'comfortable' and classed as D (indicated as purple). More families were classed as E (in pale pink) because they lived on fairly good earnings. A smaller number were classed as F (red), who were middle class and well to do. These families may have been the owners and managers of the upholstery and furniture shops that provided the area with its façade of wealth. There are patches of light blue areas classed as C where families existed on a moderate income of between 18s and 21s a week. The streets classed as B (dark blue) indicate where the very poor families and the casual poor lived in chronic want. To the north of this area is the Old Nichol, Bethnal Green, where there were many small furniture workshops. To the south of Curtain Road was the large Jewish Aldgate area whose population produced goods for the warehouses of Curtain Road.

From the 1880s, trade union representatives Jeanette Wilkinson and Elizabeth Mears reported that upholsterers worked from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m. for 15s per week. Night work only earned between 15s and 17s 4d per week. The work was seasonal with long days in the summer and no work in the winter. Mears noted that a large number of 'cheap houses' were lowering wages and conditions near where she worked in Tottenham Court Road in the West End. Despite factory inspections, many women were obliged to work longer than the statutory eight hours per day. Those who refused to do unpaid overtime were kept out of work for weeks.<sup>43</sup> Labour competition was ever increasing. Skilled women were replaced by cheaper girls, who had gleaned their knowledge from the more experienced.<sup>44</sup> As the furniture trade became second to tailoring in providing the Jewish communities' employment, Booth noted the anti-immigrant feeling. He felt unfair blame being placed upon the Jewish immigrant workers for lowering wages and 'disturbing the trades', even though they entered the trade 'as an Englishman'. Of the approximate 700 Jewish furniture workers, 76 were supported by the Board of Guardians of British Jews.<sup>45</sup>

During the economic troughs of the 1880s and 1890s, the furniture trade in both the West and East End continued to expand, with many West End workshops contracting out to the dishonourable sector in the East End. Competition grew as retail establishments, such as drapery shops, also started to sell cheap furniture.<sup>46</sup> As warehouses and retail intensified sweating, competition between workshops was such that low wages were necessary to ensure financial survival.<sup>47</sup> Some Jewish companies, such as Lebus became very profitable, and even very large and international. Lebus moved from a workshop in Whitechapel in 1857 to Tabernacle Street, Curtain Road, Shoreditch, in 1885. His warehouse facades contributed to the

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<sup>43</sup> "The Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, 23841, Wednesday December 2 1891; *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2 1891, 8; *Women's Union Journal* 172 (May 15 1890): 39.

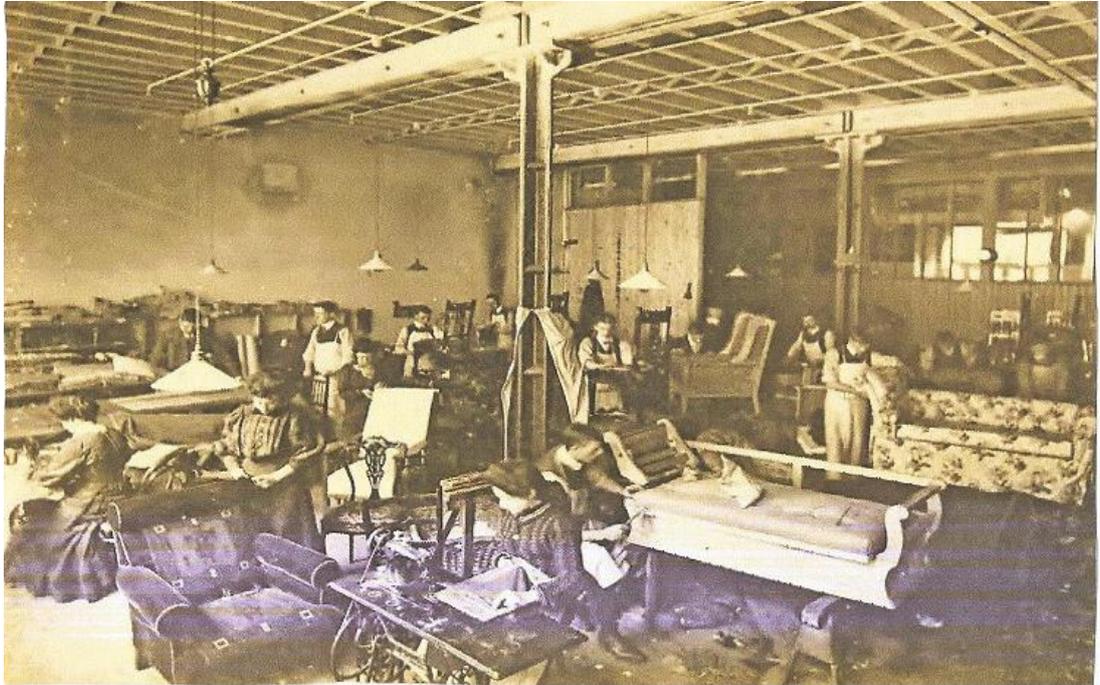
<sup>44</sup> "Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday 2 December 1891; "The Labour Commission," *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday 2 December 1891.

<sup>45</sup> Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade*, 11, 16-17.

<sup>46</sup> Kirkham, Mace and Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980*, 17-19.

<sup>47</sup> Georgio Riello, "Boundless competition: subcontracting and the London economy in the late nineteenth century," *Enterprise & Society* 13, no. 3 (2012): 504-537 (504, 534).

street's air of prosperity.<sup>48</sup> By 1899, Lebus employed 1,000 operatives and 45 managerial staff. It allowed its male and female employees to work alongside each other (see Figure 18 below).



**Figure 18: Lebus' upholstery workshop, c1900**

(Source: Oliver Lebus Family Archive, Bruce Castle Museum and Archive)

In 1900, Miss Barbara Bradby (who later became the renowned Fabian socialist Mrs Hammond) noted that, in larger shops and workplaces, men and women worked in separate spaces, but, in the smaller companies, men and women worked alongside each other. Bradby also found that women's training was still shorter and their wages lower than men's, and that 'male union prohibits her employment' except in the 'women's sphere' of sewing. Bradby noted that market forces dictated the organization of a trade's labour and wages. She believed that most women were 'not worth training as they remain in the trade such a short while' and that most lacked the 'physical and mental power' to gain the skills to enter the better paid branches of the trade. Bradby further noted that a minority of quicker girls took the opportunity to learn to cut out, which afforded them the possibility of working

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<sup>48</sup> Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade*, 23.

in a higher-class establishment. Others became forewomen, and some set up their own businesses. Bradby advocated systematic training to allow women to undertake skilled work opportunities. She suggested a journeywomen upholsterer's standard wage of 15s per week.<sup>49</sup> Such a wage, according to Booth, would have been a very poor family wage or a good contribution to a comfortable family income.

In 1900, Lebus moved to a 40-acre site in Tottenham. To ensure that it retained its workforce Lebus built houses along the tramway in South Tottenham. Lebus had so integrated the trade into the Jewish community that woodwork classes were given at Jewish Free Schools and, by 1913, girls were able to learn woodwork at the Local Mechanics Institute in Shoreditch.<sup>50</sup> Lebus also initiated the women's trade of polishing.<sup>51</sup> In 1902, the Women's Industrial Council documented this new respectable women's trade's working conditions, as seen in Figure 19 below.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Women's Industrial Council. 'Upholstery as a Trade Women for Women.' *WIC News*, no. March (1900):. reprinted in Chap. 4 in *Furnishing the World: The East London Furniture Trade, 1830-1980*, edited by Pat Kirkham, 102-05 (London: Journeyman Press, 1987) 162-3

<sup>50</sup> Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade*, 14; Kirkham, Mace and Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980*, 83, 102.

<sup>51</sup> Massil, *Immigrant furniture workers in London, 1881-1939 and the Jewish contribution to the furniture trade*, 7-9, 14.

<sup>52</sup> "WIC News," March 1902, in Kirkham, Mace and Porter, *Furnishing the world: the East London furniture trade, 1830-1980*, 62-63.



**Figure 19: Lebus' polishing shop c1914**

(Source: Oliver Lebus Family Archive, Bruce Castle Museum and Archive)

### **Dressmaking, tailoring and garment making**

In 1840, Chartist Eliza Sharples was part of the “uneasy” middle classes forced to earn her living.<sup>53</sup> Her 13-year-old daughter, Hypatia, worked from ‘8 a.m. to 8 p.m. collar stitching for 2s per week’.<sup>54</sup> Harriet Martineau noted in 1851 that there were 388,302 impecunious needlewomen in London; many of whom were surplus middle-class women with no other industrial skill.<sup>55</sup> The *Bristol Mercury* reported that

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<sup>53</sup> Laura Schwartz, *Infidel feminism: secularism, religion and women's emancipation, England 1830-1914* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 46.

<sup>54</sup> Helen Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870" (PhD University of York, 1994), 145.

<sup>55</sup> Harriet Martineau, "The needlewoman," Martineau, Harriet. 'The needlewoman,' *Once a week* (London), 24 Nov 1860 (74)

these 'white slaves of London' in the Eastern part of the metropolis were 'compelled to attend at 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning' to collect materials to make clothes for up to 19 hours per day. Dublin's *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* reported that, in St George-in-the-East, 'as many as six women occupy a room'.<sup>56</sup> *The Dark Room* found eleven working women having 'just 75 cubic feet of air, each breathing over and over again an atmosphere drained of its life-sustaining particles, and becoming hour by hour less fit to work'.<sup>57</sup> Henry Mayhew reported that more than three quarters of the dressmakers and slop-needlewomen in London were under the age of 20. Despite their age, many suffered from pulmonary complaints and, during the 1880s, tailoress Frances Hicks reported that many were hospitalized. Needlewomen's suicides were common stories.<sup>58</sup>

Estimating the number of needlewomen who sewed garments is difficult because there were numerous categories. Mayhew's research of the 1841 census shows that there were 20,780 dressmakers and milliners in London.<sup>59</sup> 'In the metropolis alone 33,500 women were engaged in the single business of apparel-making'. 'Some 21,500 were under 20 years' and 'working for between 2½d. to 4½d. per day'.<sup>60</sup> By 1864, there were 54,870 dressmakers.<sup>61</sup> Mayhew found that another 12,849 worked in seaming, shirt and corset making.<sup>62</sup> In 1865, *Reynolds miscellany of romance, general life, science and art* noted the eastward drift of prematurely aging poor middle-class needlewomen as they followed the work and cheaper

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<sup>56</sup> "White Slaves of London," *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Wednesday November 1 1843; "The white slaves of London," *Bristol Mercury* (Bristol, England), February 7 1846.

<sup>57</sup> "The London needlewoman," *The Dark Blue* 2, no. 7 (September 1871): 67.

<sup>58</sup> Frances Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," Chap. 2 In *Workers on their industries*, ed. by Frank Wallis Galton (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1896) (13-31; "Suicide of a poor needlewoman," *John Bull*, Monday August 26 1844; Helen Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870.", Ph.D. University of York, 1994 154

<sup>59</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 592.

<sup>60</sup> "Fund for promoting female emigration," *London Daily News*, Tuesday January 1 1850, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians : gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 147.

<sup>62</sup> Helen Rogers, ""The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good": the politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London." *Victorian Studies* 40.4 (1997) 589-623 (591-592).

accommodation.<sup>63</sup> The needlewoman's place of work reflected her status. Mayhew noted that the respectable, honourable, first-rate West End shops made court dresses for the aristocracy, the second-rate houses made clothes for the middle classes, and the third- and fourth-rate workshops made clothes for wives of tradesmen and mechanics.<sup>64</sup> Tailoress and trade union secretary, Frances Hicks, noted that there were many classes of dressmakers, and that its associated domestic femininity was used to justify its low wage. 'The largest class are daughters of skilled mechanics who refuse to enter "house slavery" and wish to avoid mixing with factory girls who are reputed to be rough'. Dressmaking 'is technically known as a business, just as tailoring is styled a trade... business is thought more ladylike than a trade, and indeed next door to a profession'.<sup>65</sup>

Mayhew reported in the *Morning Chronicle* that, of the 454 tailoring masters in London's West End, only one-sixth ran honourable shops with good working conditions.<sup>66</sup> Many contracted out the making of quality clothes for the wealthy to workshops in the East.<sup>67</sup> At least 10,000 dressmakers worked in the dishonourable sector.<sup>68</sup> London and international fashion seasons ran from April to July and from October to Christmas. The excessively long working day could start at 4 a.m. and finish at 10 p.m.<sup>69</sup> In-between seasons, many undertook needlework for wealthy

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<sup>63</sup> "Needlewomen of London," *Reynolds miscellany of romance, general life, science and art* (London, England), January 28 1865.

<sup>64</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 248.

<sup>65</sup> Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," 13-31.

<sup>66</sup>. Anne Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*. (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995), 6; Sheila Blackburn, "'Princesses and Sweated-Wage Slaves Go Well Together': Images of British Sweated Workers, 1843-1914." *International labour and working class history* Spring, no. 61 (2002) 22-44 (28)

<sup>67</sup> London, L.S.E. [Flyer] "London Tailoresses' Trade Union: East End branch. A public meeting at Toynbee Hall...Monday 23rd July 1894." WIC/D; Jade Halbert, "Liberating the Slaves of the Needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863." *Retrospectives* 3 (2014) 44-58 (51) ; Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London" 592.

<sup>68</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 592.

<sup>69</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 249.

families for up to 6s per week.<sup>70</sup> Martineau noted that many household managers justified their slave wages by the fact that needle skills had been learned in the home.<sup>71</sup> Needlewomen caused further alarm when it was found that they passed on illnesses to their customers through the garments they made. One infamous case revealed a needlewoman using the shirts she had to sew as bed linen.<sup>72</sup> It was also common knowledge that needlewomen supplemented their wages through prostitution.<sup>73</sup>

Mayhew found that desperate workers were willing to tell the world of their working conditions. A tailor reported that he was paid 2s 9d for 12 sets of children's clothes composed of knickers and sailor jackets with turndown collars. He earned about 8s a week and supplied his own cotton. For every shilling he earned his employer deducted 1d for the steam power his sewing machine used, 1d for the dining room, and 1d for the hospital, doctor and sick payments. Girls resented the mandatory medical examination they endured in the presence of men. The tailor opined that the organization of working women was hopeless because there were always others, even men, who would work for a lower wage.<sup>74</sup> Despite the labour force being saturated with needlewomen, philanthropist Lady Angela Burdett-Coutts set up girls' sewing classes in Spitalfields in 1860 as seen in Figure 20 below.

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<sup>70</sup> Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," 13-31.

<sup>71</sup> Harriet Martineau, "The needlewoman," *Once a week* (London, England), November 24 1860.

<sup>72</sup> Sheila Blackburn, "'Princesses and sweated-wage slaves go well together: images of British sweated workers, 1843-1914,' *International labour and working class history* 61 (Spring 2002): 29.

<sup>73</sup> "Distressed needlewomen of the metropolis," *Examiner* (London, England), December 8 1849; John Plain, "Letters to the industrious classes: letter III: to the needlewomen of the United Kingdom," *Reynolds miscellany of romance, general literature, science and art* (London, England), February 20 1847; Gleade, *British women in the nineteenth century*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 25.



SEWING-CLASS IN BERNER-STREET, COMMERCIAL-ROAD EAST.

**Figure 20: A sewing class organized in the St John Mission district for widows and wives of the unemployed, Berner Street, Commercial Road.** The picture was published in *Illustrated London News*, February 15 1868

(Source: Mary Evans Picture Library)

In 1863, *The Times* reported the death of the needlewoman Mary Anne Walkley, who worked for a West End dressmaker. *Punch*'s John Leech drew an image entitled "Ghost in the Looking Glass," which depicted Mary Anne reflected through a looking glass at a wealthy woman wearing a dress made by Mary Anne.<sup>75</sup> H. W. Lord's report on dressmaking for the 1864 Children's Employment Commission documented such appalling working and living conditions that the state could not continue to ignore women's sweated labour.<sup>76</sup> Despite civil society's alarm at needlewomen's poverty, the government, under the pretext of providing employment for the vulnerable, employed sub-contractors, or sweaters, who employed military widows, disabled soldiers and their children to make uniforms. Despite the skilled work involved, their wages were so low that the parish was forced to subsidize them. Tie making, an integral part of such tailoring, earned less than

<sup>75</sup> Christina Walkley, *The ghost in the looking glass: the Victorian seamstress* (London: Owen, 1981), 47.

<sup>76</sup> "Needlewomen of London," *Reynolds miscellany of romance, general life, science and art* (London, England), January 28 1865.

home shirt makers.<sup>77</sup> Wholesalers “show shops” were now prevalent in both the West and East End. Employers relied upon outworkers who had purchased their own sewing machine.<sup>78</sup> In 1872, the *Jewish Chronicle* reported that the availability of hire purchase Singer sewing machines was enabling the expansion of the outwork labour market. Bandsaws were also becoming commonplace. These machines were advertised in mainstream newspapers and through communications, such as Emily Faithful’s *Women and Work: a weekly industrial, educational and household register* for women to help middle-class women find work.<sup>79</sup>

During the 1880s, Frances Hicks’ family’s politics had forced her to close her school and retrain as a dressmaker. Frances found a dressmaker experienced in the “West End style,” who had set up in a suburb to teach trades people, farmers’ daughters and upper-class servants. She charged £100 per year for three years. A new apprentice undertook very basic work and earned between 2s and 2s 6d a week. Although Frances’ father had paid for her evening lessons, she could only attend 2 lessons out of 13 because she was delayed leaving. Apprentices worked a season in a West End shop for 8s a week. As they only undertook the processes they were more proficient at, they did not learn new skills. The forewoman, or fitter, could earn between 2 and 7 guineas a week, but the average skilled workwoman earned between 15s and 16s per week. The majority were seasonal hands; many of whom were forced to let their rent get into arrears.<sup>80</sup>

Machinists worked with dressmakers and earned between 16s and 24s per week. Machining heavier fabrics, such as corduroy, earned between 10s and 30s per week. Very few women could do this work for more than five years without their health being ruined. Machinists could undertake piecework in factories; some of which was steam powered for between 16s and 25s per week. Frances found that

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<sup>77</sup> "The workpeople of the army clothing factory," *Daily Chronicle* (London, England), 1880.

<sup>78</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 248.

<sup>79</sup> *Women and Work: a weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, ed. Emily Faithful (London: Victoria Press, 1874-1876); Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, 106-7.

<sup>80</sup> Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," 13-31.

some workwomen's books showed 1,097 garments being made in 11 months and that the average of 31 garments earned 5s 1d per week. A cotton dress was made for 7d. Women earned from between 3s and 11s 3d per week. Much of this work was for asylums, infirmaries and workhouses paid for by public funds. In comparison, a tailoress could earn a wage from 18s to 30s. Some homeworkers sub-contracted young girls for up to 6s per week to wait at their employers for work to be made up.<sup>81</sup> Moses reported that unmarried Jewish girls would return to the shop three or four times a day to check for work.<sup>82</sup> In 1896, Frances Hicks believed that homeworkers lowered the price for labour and advocated that they should combine in workshops to ensure their protection under the Factory Acts, which should enforce the minimum wage.<sup>83</sup>

Lewis Lyons found tailoring the most synchronized sweated trade in Jewish labour geographies.<sup>84</sup> Singer sewing machine agents barely existed on their commission, and contractors were often out of pocket.<sup>85</sup> Profit margins were maintained as experienced workers were substituted by cheap "greeners" taken off the boats at the docks by Jewish sweaters.<sup>86</sup> Some Polish Jews 'lived in' for 16 years on the lowest rate, and cases of 'kidnapped' Irish workers 'bound in debt' to the sweater were common.<sup>87</sup> In 1887, the combined number working in tailoring was 16,000, of whom most were foreign and native Jewish men, women and children.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," 13-31.

<sup>82</sup> Warwick University, Modern Records Centre, Labour Correspondent, House of Lords report to Board of Trade on Sweating in East London, February 17 1888, 12. MS 240/W/3/4.

<sup>83</sup> Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," 13-31.

<sup>84</sup> Lewis Lyons, *The Horrible Sweating System* (London: 1885), 4.

<sup>85</sup> "Singer's sewing machine agent," *Justice: The Organ for Social Justice*, August 24 1889.

<sup>86</sup> L. Selitrenny, "The Jewish working woman in the East End," *Social Democrat: a Monthly Socialist Review* (London, England) 9 (September 1898).

<sup>87</sup> Clementina Black, ed., *Married Women's Work: being the report of the an inquiry undertaken by the Women's Industrial Council* (G.Bell: London, 1915), 68; Blackburn, "'Princesses and sweated-wage slaves go well together': images of British sweated workers, 1843-1914," 27.

<sup>88</sup> Coventry, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Labour Correspondent, *House of Lords report to Board of Trade on Sweating in East London*, February 17 1888, 12. MS 240/W/3/4; Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 137.

However, in other branches of garment making there was more cultural interaction, for example, 56% of shirtmakers were English.<sup>89</sup> Board of Trades' investigator John Burnett found that most tailoring workshops employed between 10 and 40.<sup>90</sup> Lewis Lyons' *Anti-Sweater* revealed that the East End factories, Lottery & Co and Schneider & Co, employed 400 female hands operating steam-powered machines in poor conditions.<sup>91</sup> Moses reported that, in the larger workshops or small factories, women did everything except machine pressing for 3d per day.<sup>92</sup> What is surprising is that, in 1905, the Women's Industrial Council found that tailoring was increasingly being carried out in large factories that were 'well appointed' where men and women worked in separate rooms.<sup>93</sup>

Booth's 1890s' survey found between 30,000 and 40,000 Jewish persons of all nationalities working in some 900 Jewish contractors' workshops or in their homes for West End and City firms. The tailoring trade was tightly organized into small areas. The 'Jewish coat-making industry was concentrated within the whole of Whitechapel, an area of less than one square mile, and a small piece of Mile End, and a part of St George's-in-the-East'. To the east of this coat-making area, slop trouser and juvenile garments were made in workshops in Mile End Old Town, Stepney and Poplar. In the heart of inner East London was Petticoat Lane market, which displayed slop work for export.<sup>94</sup> The slop trades of garment making and tailoring undertaken by the Jewish community came to characterize Aldgate. The slop trades' existence was blamed upon its vulnerable female and foreign workers, who depended upon it.

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<sup>89</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 137.

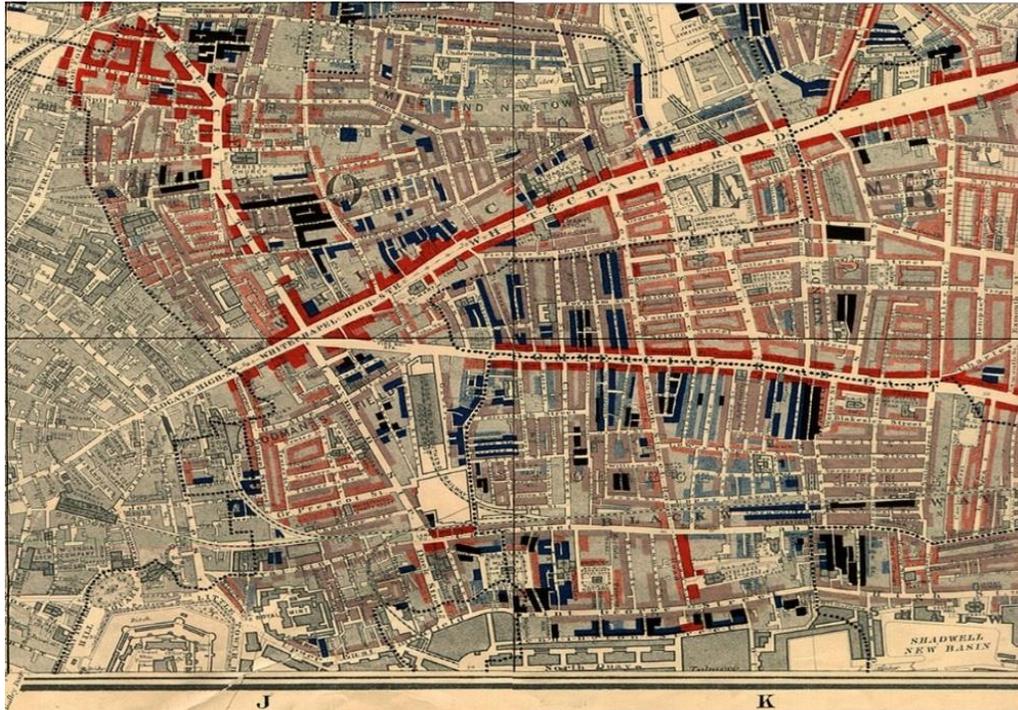
<sup>90</sup> Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, 109.

<sup>91</sup> Lewis Lyons, ed. *Anti-Sweater* (London: Printed for the Proprietor by J.W. Lansdown, 1886-1887); Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Coventry, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, Labour Correspondent, *House of Lords report to Board of Trade on Sweating in East London, February 17 1888*, 12. MS 240/W/3/4.

<sup>93</sup> *The Women's Industrial News*, December 1905, 519.

<sup>94</sup> Laura Vaughan, "The study of spatial characteristics of Jews in London, 1695 & 1895" (MSc University College London, 1994), 21.



**Figure21: Tailoring and garment making area** extracted from Booth's *Map Descriptive of London Poverty 1898-1899*. Sheet 5: East Central District

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

Booth's map indicates the economic zones of Aldgate, Spitalfields and Whitechapel. The poorest black areas indicate where the 'vicious, semi-criminal' families lived. Booth found Class B's very poor and casual workers in chronic want (indicated by dark blue) near the Class C families that survived on a family wage of between 18s and 21s (indicated by pale blue). These areas are surrounded by purple, indicative of Class D, which was a mixture of comfortable and poor families. However, towards the central eastern area lived Class E: fairly comfortable families with good ordinary earnings (indicated by pink). The middle class and well to do lived in the main thoroughfares of Whitechapel and Commercial Street (lined in red), indicating perhaps the profitability of these locations. The poorer areas were more densely populated than the wealthy areas, but the whole area was constantly busy.

By the end of the century, needlewomen were "next to domestic servants" as the largest class of women workers. Dressmakers formed by far the largest class of needlewomen and tailoring was one of London's main trades. Needlewomen, like

Frances Hicks, moved between the two sectors.<sup>95</sup> In 1897, Booth's investigation of census data found that, while there were large numbers of employers in the form of sub-contractors, there were also huge numbers of outworkers which he described as as 'working on their own account' who sought out their own work. Booth found: 353 employers of shirt-makers and seamstresses, while 3,581 worked on their own account; 5,280 employers of dress-makers and milliners, while 18,500 worked on their own account; and 3,767 employers of tailors, while 3,363 worked on their own account.<sup>96</sup> By 1911, the combined number of tailors and tailoresses had doubled to 64,993, with tailoresses being the clear majority.<sup>97</sup> Despite worker isolation in small workshops or their homes, Chapters 5 to 8 show that many garment makers did indeed join unions and participate in the broad labour movement. However, protecting themselves from their sweated working conditions proved difficult. Gertrude Tuckwell was left with a lasting impression of the impact of such toil when she saw tailoress and trade unionist, Mrs Cooper, who collected the union members' dues, die in hospital.<sup>98</sup>

## Confectionery

East London's confectionery industry grew during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had become an important trade with at least 13 large confectionery companies in Stepney, East London. Their factories were located close to the docks for easy access to their imports of sugar, nuts and fruit from East India and other colonies. These new imports expanded their production of new sweets, chocolates, jams and foods for foreign, national and local London markets.<sup>99</sup> The unskilled

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<sup>95</sup> Hicks, "Dressmakers and tailoresses," 14.

<sup>96</sup> Donna Loftus, "Investigating work in late nineteenth century London," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 71. (2011) 173-93 (178.)

<sup>97</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 137; Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939* (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995), 110.

<sup>98</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, *Gertrude Tuckwell, Reminiscences* (unpublished autobiography), chap. 11. Reel 17 A/140.

<sup>99</sup> William Glenny Croy, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), chap. 23, 199; "East London Industries," *East London Observer*, December 4 1875.

nature of the work made it a trade open to anyone. Even Emily Faithful's middle-class employment agency advertised confectionery work.<sup>100</sup> However, by 1881, only 40% of its workers were English. Large numbers were Irish.<sup>101</sup>

William Glenny Crory focused his inquiry on the four confectionery firms of: Messrs Batger and Co., on Broad Street, Ratcliff; Messrs Martin and Noble, in Old Ford; Messrs Hill and Jones, on Commercial Road; and Messrs Volckman and Son, in Stratford. Crory found their management in good order and noticed a 'liberal outlay of capital' and mechanization in the trade.<sup>102</sup> Batger's was established in 1748. In 1864, it moved to the acre site in Bishopsgate, which was 'crowded with machinery, stock and employees'. Batger's employed 450 permanent hands, another 550 at Christmas, and 700 during the English fruit season. Much of the finer work was undertaken as 'piece work'.<sup>103</sup> A smaller and younger company, Messrs Martin and Noble, employed many more women and children than Batger.<sup>104</sup> Crory found that, during the confectionery trade's downtime, confectioners worked in the match making season in winter.<sup>105</sup> Wages were paid in accordance with the class of work undertaken. Pickle and jam makers were paid as little as 2s to 3s per day. Quick workers on piece rates earned much higher wages.

Crory found that male workers mostly manufactured jams, preserves, pickles and sweets while women were employed for labelling, packing and other such processes. He found no evidence of women undertaking heavy work. Only a minority of the better hands were permanently employed. Crory did not find evidence of deductions, or the prohibition of workers leaving the premises at lunchtime. Confectionery workers disagreed with Crory's findings, but it was not until the 1890s

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<sup>100</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, Saturday June 20 1874.

<sup>101</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 137.

<sup>102</sup> "East London Industries," *East London Observer*, December 4 1875.

<sup>103</sup> William Glenny Crory, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), 202.

<sup>104</sup> "Child-slavery in the jam factory," *The Review of Reviews*, May 1809, 468.

<sup>105</sup> William Glenny Crory, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), 205; Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history*, (London: Continuum, 2011) 25.

that workers' complaints became louder. Wages were usually between 7s and 9s.12s was an unusually high wage. Employers often deducted fees and fines, forced workers to belong to a sick fund at 3½d per week and dismissed workers without notice.<sup>106</sup> Women did indeed undertake the heavy work of jam and pickle making. Clementina Black found married women lifting pans of 56lbs in weight.<sup>107</sup> One girl carried 72-gallon pails over 80 yards for between 7s and 8s a week.<sup>108</sup> A trade union secretary reported that approximately 3,000 suffered these exhausting working conditions. Black's words were reported by regional papers.<sup>109</sup>

Trade unionist Amie Hicks also reported the trade's dangers:

Confectioners drenched from bottle washing would then stand in cold streets, starch rotted their boots and clothes, and if they slipped when carrying trays of boiling jam they had to pay full price for the breakages besides being burnt. On average there were 6 accidents per day in the mineral bottle factory with glass flying into eyes. Girls who worked with caustic suffered skin burns and those who worked with ammonia, worked by an open door to avoid being rendered insensible.<sup>110</sup>

Booth's map in Figure23 below shows the locations of Messrs Allen's confectionery factories.

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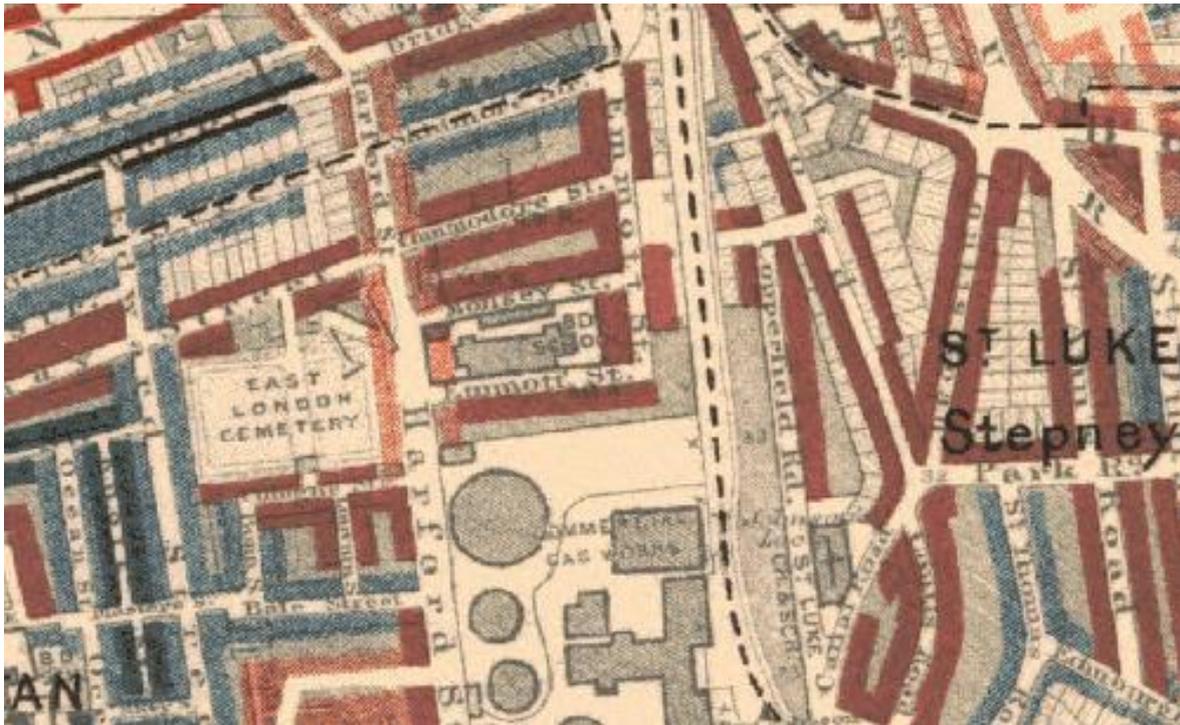
<sup>106</sup> L.S.E. *Women's Trade Union Association 1<sup>st</sup> Report 1889*, 4, WIC/B/1.

<sup>107</sup> Clementina Black, ed., *Married Women's Work: being the report of the an inquiry undertaken by the Women's Industrial Council*, (London: Virago, 1915; 1983) 45

<sup>108</sup> "Child-slavery in the jam factory," *The Review of Reviews*, May 1809, 468.

<sup>109</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891; *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2 1891, 8.

<sup>110</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," (March 1892), 19/1, 19/9 Gertrude Tuckwell Archive.



**Figure22: The location of Allen's confectionery factories**, extracted from Booth's *Map Descriptive of London's Poverty* 1898-1899. Sheet 1: Eastern District

(Source: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>)

Booth lined Copperfield Road and Emmot Street in purple to indicate that Class D, which was a mix of comfortable and poor families, lived there. Many of these workers were probably the factories' shop floor managers. Two and three streets away from the factories were homes of families classified as Class C (light blue) that lived on wages of between 18s and 21s. The minority of dark blue and black lined streets were where Class B families in chronic want, and Class A families, who existed with criminal intent, lived.

In 1897, Booth found that the confectionery trade was composed of 3,434 employers of bakers and confectioners, while 2,192 worked on their own account.<sup>111</sup> By 1899, the industry had become reliant upon young girls of 13 and 14 years of age, who were 'steamed or soaked' all day. Many became ill with bronchitis, which often became pneumonia and consumption. The image of women jam makers in

<sup>111</sup> Loftus, "Investigating work in late nineteenth century London," 178.

1918 in Figure23 below illustrates that the trade's hazardous nature had not improved.



**Figure23: Women jam makers at work.** Illustrated by D. Macpherson for *The Sphere*, May 4 1918.

(Source: Mary Evans Picture Library)

In 1908, the *Evening Standard* reported that women confectioners' working day of 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. was very good compared to other women's trades. It found that some work was still deemed 'men's work', but that women could gain experience in every department, or become very skilled in one subdivision. A fast worker could earn a higher wage of 20s per week and be promoted to a forewoman.<sup>112</sup> Many did not earn these wages. In 1909, several hundreds of women and girls demonstrated on behalf of the striking women workers of Messrs R.S. Murray and Co. in Turnmill Street, Farringdon. The company was forced to improve

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<sup>112</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, "London women and their work: the makers of sweets," *Evening Standard*, February 7 1908, in Gertrude Tuckwell archive: press cuttings.

its minimum piece rates to between 8s and 12s per week for workers over 15 years of age.<sup>113</sup>

## Ropemaking

The ropemaking trade developed around the docks. Initially, mostly used in ship building, ropes soon came to be used in a myriad of trades, for example, Croy found that confectioners Batger used ropes made by local ropemaker Frosts Ltd.<sup>114</sup> The map of the area in Figure 24 below shows that, by the 1890s, different classes of workers lived close to each other. There was only a small number of black streets that Booth deemed of vicious and criminal intent (Class A). Around the St James dockland area and to the north, some dark blue Class B families lived in chronic want. Nearby were some light blue Class C families, who earned wages of between 18s and 21s. There were slightly more purple Class D families; a mix of comfortable and poor families. A minority were Class E families: families living on good incomes. Commercial Street, lined in red, indicates where middle-class families lived. This snapshot indicates that there was relative prosperity around the docks.

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<sup>113</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library "Confectionery wages: rates fixed for London women workers," *The Standard* (London, England), 1909, Gertrude Tuckwell archive: press cuttings.

<sup>114</sup> William Glenny Croy, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), 202.



**Figure24: The location of the ropemaking trade**, extracted from Booth's *Map Descriptive of London Poverty 1898-1899*. Sheet 1: Eastern District

(Source: k)

By 1875, Frosts & Sons, located in Shadwell, East London, was the largest rope manufacturer in the UK. Croy found it probably the most extensive and certainly the best ordered and efficiently run factory in East London. It was suggested to Croy that, before the existence of Frost Brothers Ltd, there were many smaller ropemakers in East London, which employed 500 hands.<sup>115</sup> The youngest and smallest company Croy investigated was Messrs Davis and West of Coborn Road, Bow. It employed 120 hands and used homeworkers to spin. Another company, Hawkins & Tipson, was founded in 1846 in the City. In 1889, it moved to 48-51 Minories, and then, in 1908, it took three floors of Globe House at 29 Minories. Ropemaker Charles Hawkins remembered that, in 1846, he earned 28s per week, the frame hands earned between 22s and 24s, boys were employed at 8s, women mill hands earned 9s and spinners earned 10s per week. The company also had a fitter, who earned 38s per week. All worked 54 hours per week with half an hour for

<sup>115</sup>William Glenny Croy, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), 176.

breaks and an hour for lunch. Wages were paid at 1.30 p.m. on Saturday as the works closed.<sup>116</sup>

Hawkins & Timpson introduced spinner piece rate wages of between 14s and 16s per week. Initially, the spinners raised concerns, but 'upon trialling it found they earned 50% more'. 'Prices were cut very fine. The rope trade became classed as sweated, but as an individual firm we were powerless to improve conditions'.<sup>117</sup> The industry was reliant on hemp from Manila and, although it was a mechanized industry, there was much hand work. Crory noted that 'the machines are easily attended to. Any person of either sex can look after one'. He also noted that it was 'healthy' work as 'handling of hemp is very wholesome'.<sup>118</sup> Again, workers disagreed with Crory, and Chapter 7 documents women ropemakers employed at Frosts & Sons trade union mobilisation. The Ropemakers Union secretary, Amie Hicks, was drawn to their cause when she saw their bandaged hands.<sup>119</sup> The union undertook their own inquiry into their trade's working conditions and calculated that 2,000 women were employed in the trade.<sup>120</sup>

Two ropemakers reported to the Labour Commission that in 1887 they earned a weekly 19s. In 1891, ropemakers earned between 7s and 11s 6d per week for working days from 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. and from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Women workers were prohibited from leaving the factory at lunchtime and a fear of dismissal pervaded the factories. The women workers often had chest complaints and were subjected to the foremen's abusive, offensive and obscene comments.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> London, Bishopsgate Institute, Charles H. Hawkins, *The story of Hawkins & Tipson: as told as a series of reminiscences* (London: Hawkins & Tipson Ltd, [195?]).

<sup>117</sup> Hawkins, *The story of Hawkins & Tipson: as told as a series of reminiscences*. (London: Hawkins & Tipson Ltd [195?]).

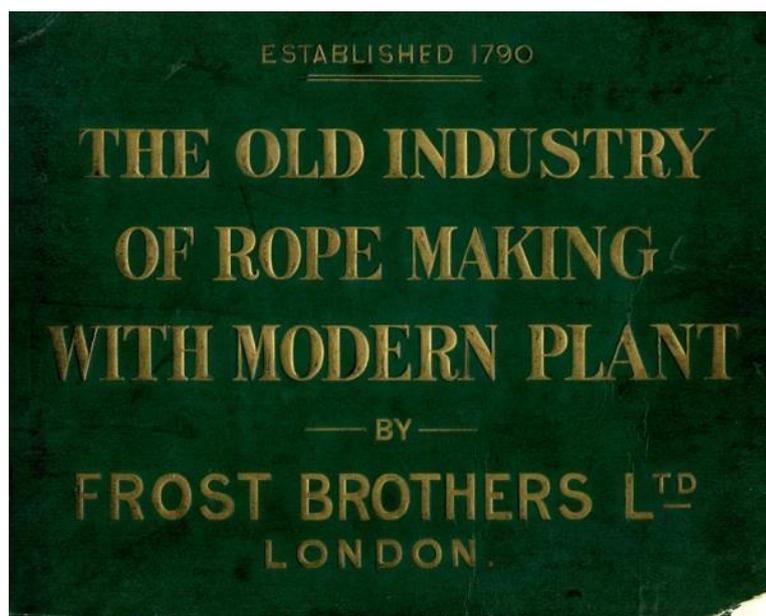
<sup>118</sup> William Glenny Crory, *East London Industries* (London: Longmans, 1876), 175.

<sup>119</sup> "The Rope Workers, headed by Mrs Amie Hicks," News, *The Woman Signal* (London, England), 84, Thursday August 8 1895.

<sup>120</sup> University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, *East London Ropemakers' Trade Union, Minute book, 1890-1895*, 627/2/1.

<sup>121</sup> "The Labour Commission," in *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2, 1891; *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2, 8.

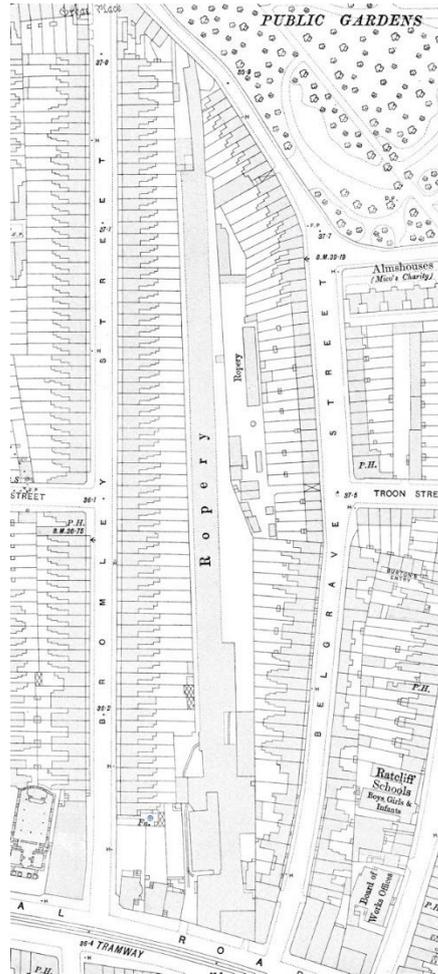
Hicks reported that women worked machinery, lifted heavy cans full of yarn and rope, spun yarn and 'hackled great flocks into line'. Accidents were frequent, especially when machinery was not safely guarded. When a drum broke, the belt flew out and would often cut a gash into a woman's head, knocking her out. She was 'usually placed outside for a time to see what harm has really been done'. If necessary, she was sent to the hospital. Her wages were stopped from the time of the accident. Women tended to return to work too soon and then took several days off in succession and Hicks noted 'the machinery has more rights than the women'. The ropery's 'sanitary conditions require an inspector to see them for themselves'. Female ropemakers 'seldom got old'.<sup>122</sup> The illustrations and photographic evidence in Figure 25 below show the size of Frost Brothers Ltd, and some of the variety of heavy manual work women undertook from sorting the hemp to managing machines.<sup>123</sup>



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<sup>122</sup> "The Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2, 1891, *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2, 8.

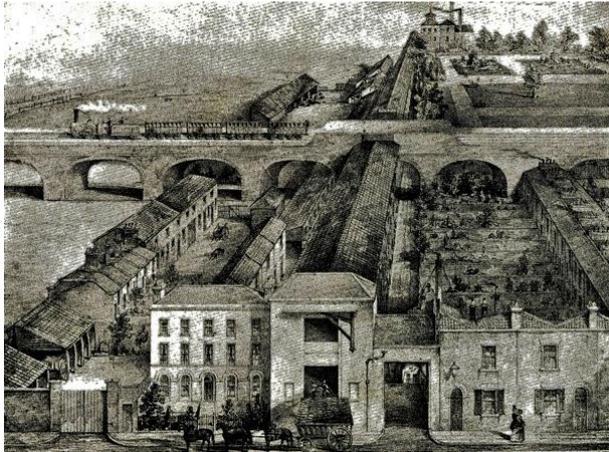
<sup>123</sup> London, Bishopsgate Institute, Frost Brothers Ltd, *Rope makers and yarn spinners*, 1906, LCM/351.



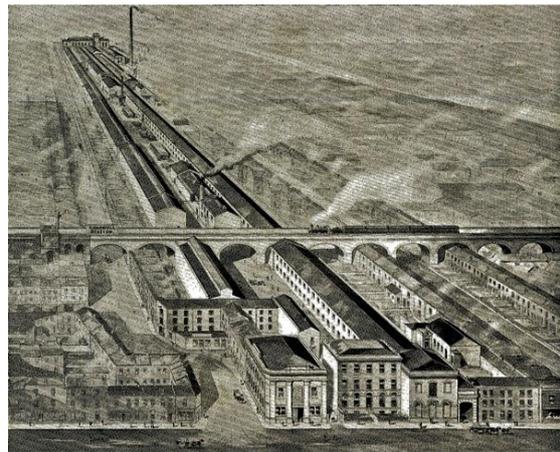
The Frosts Ltd ropery



Frost workers. The men in the bowler hats are managers



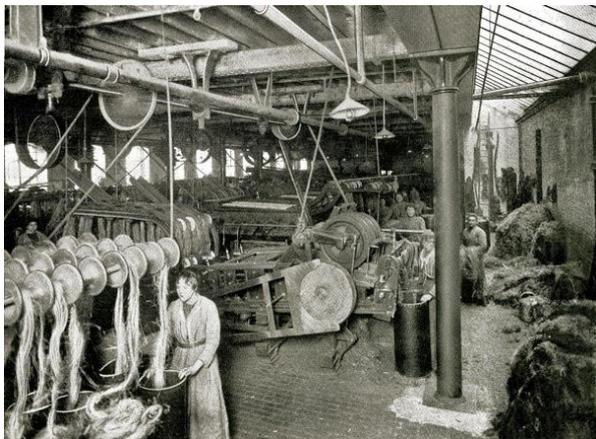
Frost Ropery before the fire in 1860



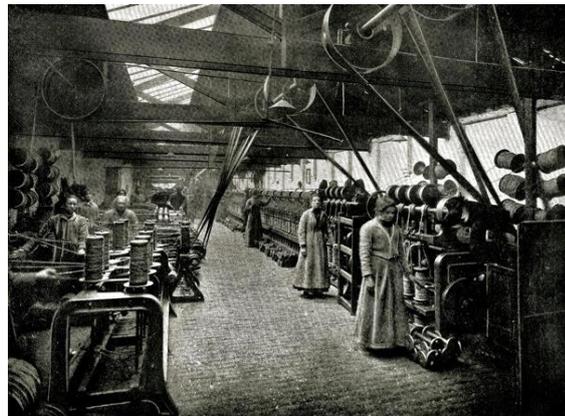
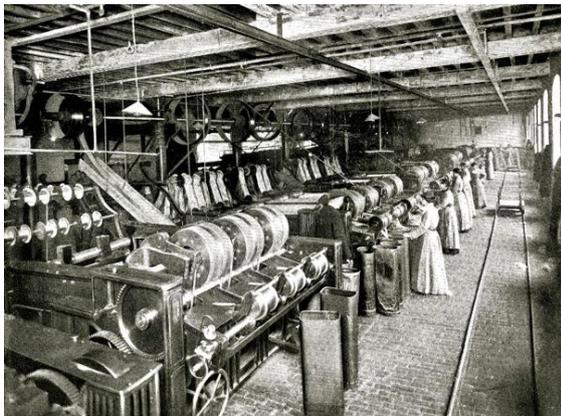
The Frost ropery in 1906



First process in spinning Manila hemp, imported in bales from the Philippine Islands. Women fed the hemp into the spreading machines



Russian and Italian hemp preparing room



Front and back of the Manila finishing drawing machines

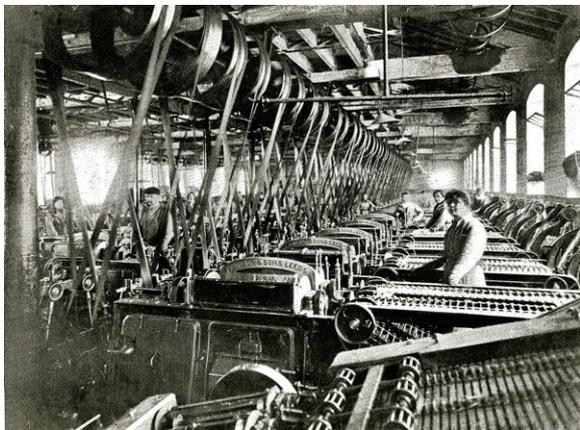


Figure25: Images of women ropemakers and yarn spinners, Frost Brothers Ltd

(Source Bishopsgate Institute)

Two-thirds of women ropemakers were married and their double burden was incessant.

After work they walked home, fetching their children from nurseries on the way. They got their children's tea, washed them, saw to the

cooking (if there was any) for the next day, made the beds and cleaned up the house. For girls, it was the same life...they have never done – month after month, year after year, no hope, no cessation, unless they are thrown out of work...The wages were so small it was quite impossible with children...the rent for the two necessary rooms was from four to five shillings a week; one shilling for fares, sixpence for soap and washing materials; then food for five people, the man's tobacco, clothes, boots, etc for the little ones.<sup>124</sup>

In 1912, when the Manila twine market and ship owners fell on lean times, Charles Hawkins invested well in excess Manila twine and a barque. However, he 'struggled' with both the Ropemakers and the Manila Hemp Associations. In 1915, when a Board of Trade official called to enquire into wage rates and conditions, Hawkins 'welcomed him with open arms'. Subsequently rates were raised to more equitable rates.<sup>125</sup> By this point, most trades employed outworkers, including the rope trade. Most industrial work remained unhealthy, casual and temporary. Booth had concluded that those who worked 'on their own account' dominated the labour market. In 1906, the Association of Trained Charwomen, Caretakers, Supply Servants, Laundry Women, Jobbing Dressmakers, Upholstresses, Carpet Menders and Women for Odd Jobs had 1,290 employers on its books. Between the months of February to October, there were 534 women looking for work, but only 476 new situations offered. Only 85 were employed permanently, while 409 were temporary.<sup>126</sup> In 1906, the COS reported that "unskilled" workers moved between the skilled trades of instrument making and electrical work, military harness and boot making and pattern making and carpentry.

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<sup>124</sup> "The Rope Workers', headed by Mrs Amie Hicks," News, *The Woman Signal* (London, England), 84, Thursday August 8 1895.

<sup>125</sup> Charles Hawkins, *The story of Hawkins & Tipson: as told as a series of reminiscences*. (London, Hawkins & Tipson Ltd, [195?])

<sup>126</sup> *Caretakers Association of Trained Charwomen, Supply Servants, Laundry Women, Jobbing Dressmakers, Upholstresses, Carpet Menders and Women for Odd Jobs, Eighth annual report and balance sheet, 1905-1906* (London: Women's Industrial Council, 1906).

## Conclusion

Women were evidently 'active producers of economic landscapes and the uneven development of capitalism'.<sup>127</sup> They were an integral part of a global economy and a competitive sweated labour force. Only the more fortunate had regular employment and wages that did not decline. The number of people who worked "on their own account", or became employers increased as employment on piecework rates became more common. Women workers required great resilience and physical strength to survive on their wages. Booth's maps indicate that some women workers, to coin Orr et al, had an accumulation of choice, but most were just coping or surviving on their wages. While workforces were segregated by gender in larger workplaces, such as in ropemakers Frosts Ltd, smaller workplaces were often not. In the larger factories, the gender segregation existed to ensure that the work was labelled women's work to justify its women's wages. Women's work was often comparable to traditional "men's work" in that it was inclusive of heavy manual labour and often involved use of machinery. A factory worker's day was a long and hard one and employers often insisted that workers worked overtime. However, factory work was often preferable to working in smaller workshops, or in homes. Although factory work increased during the nineteenth century, contracted 'outwork' undertaken in small workshops and homes remained ubiquitous. Work grew increasingly hazardous.<sup>128</sup>

Women's industrial skills were mostly underacknowledged, but a woman could be promoted to forewoman in the larger workshops and factories. In the smaller and more exploitative workshops, women were able to gain knowledge and experience of a diverse array of skilled work until they were replaced by cheaper girls. Employers encouraged women workers' use of new technologies to improve productivity. Although women's work was defined as unskilled, as Booth concluded, the definition of skilled and unskilled was 'inexact and unscientific', and wage rates

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<sup>127</sup> Andrew Herod, "Workers, space and labor geography," *International Labor and Working Class History* 64 (Fall 2003): 113.

<sup>128</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 27-55.

bore no relevance to skill.<sup>129</sup> However, as the nineteenth century progressed there was greater acceptance of women's place in the public sphere of the labour market. The view that a woman's waged work undermined her respectability had waned to the point that employers were highlighting the respectability of their trade to attract workers. In doing so they encouraged the anarchy of competition by ensuring that they had greater choice of employees. By 1914, employers, the state being one, depended upon women's flexibility in the labour market and low wages. The wealth of the minority still clearly lay in the physical or corporeal industrial exploitation of workers.

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<sup>129</sup> Loftus, "Investigating work in the late nineteenth century London"175.

## Chapter 4: Who were working-class women trade unionists?

### Introduction

This biographical chapter introduces an intergenerational network of working-class women trade union secretaries who had many years 'practical' work experience in the trades they represented.<sup>1</sup> This chapter follows the formative process of their feminist and political agency in the spatial expansion of East London. As Renders et al note, 'biographical perspective embodies the viewpoint of individual agency and human experience'.<sup>2</sup> It also responds to Liz Stanley's question 'Is there a feminist biography?' and its implication in the construction of womanhood.<sup>3</sup> By placing these individuals in their past, and understanding their actions in temporal context, the historian gleans a more profound understanding of the rationale behind their actions and words. All, but one of these secretaries organized unions under the middle-class platforms of the Women's Protective and Provident League and the Women's Trade Union Association, which this thesis will now refer to as the League and Association. Their voices were reported in trade union reports, as well as in local, regional and national press. As they intersected in the broad labour movement's platforms, they inspired generations of women workers' agency to influence the state from below.

The first generation of this network of trade union secretaries included bookfolders, Miss Mary Zugg and Miss Eleanor Whyte. Born in the 1820s, they were working in the 1840s. They remained unmarried surplus working women throughout their adult lives. During the 1830s and 1840s, they would have heard the Owenite advocacy of women's equality and trade unions, the Chartist rhetoric to return women to the home and witnessed workers' political militancy. They would have

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920) 13; *The Women's Union Journal: the Organ of the Women's Protective and Provident League*, 1, no. 1 (1876).

<sup>2</sup> *The biographical turn: lives in history*, Hans Renders, Hann de Binne and Jonne Harmsma eds., (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Liz Stanley, "Moments of writing: is there a feminist auto/biography," *Gender & History* 2, no. 1 (1990): 59-66 (62).

experienced the quieter 1850s when the economy recovered. The second generation of the trade union network was composed of: carpet sewer, Miss Jeannette Gaury (or Gawry) Wilkinson; upholsterer, Miss Elizabeth Mears; tailoress and machinist, Miss Rosa Mariner; and shoemaker, ropemaker and midwife, Mrs Amelia (Amie) Jane Hicks. Born in the 1840s, they could well have been aware of Zugg and the infamous bible women's strike and agency. Growing up in the quieter times of the 1850s and 1860s, they were politicized by their family and working lives. The third generation of trade union secretaries was born in the 1860s and 1870s, and included: tailoress Mrs Marian Curran, nee Barry; Amie Hicks' daughter, tailoress Frances Hicks, and her adopted sister, confectioner, Clara (Claire) James.

### **Bookfolder, Miss Mary Elizabeth Zugg (1828-1861)**

Mary Zugg was born to William and Elizabeth Zugg and had two siblings. After her father's death, her mother remarried and, at the age of 50, became head of the family of four children, the youngest being 16. Mary's mother worked as a bookfolder and they lived in St Botolph without Aldersgate.<sup>4</sup> Mary's earnings would have contributed to the family wage. She was employed by the British and Foreign Bible Society's contractor, who often placed advertisements for 'respectable girls' for apprenticeships.<sup>5</sup> Chartist trade unionist, Thomas Dunning, opined that she was a skilled bookbinder and that if she had not been so constrained by her working conditions, she would have been able to 'rise'.<sup>6</sup>

Although the 1840s was a time of political antagonism in East London there is no evidence that Zugg was an Owenite, or a Chartist, or that she attended political rallies. Chapter 5 documents how Zugg led female bookbinders out on strike in 1849; a time when women workers had little public voice and were ostracized by male workers for lowering working conditions and wages. With the aid of male trade

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<sup>4</sup> "1861 England Census Class: RG 9; Piece: 215; Folio: 110; Page: 19; GSU roll: 542593", accessed February 2 2021, <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>.

<sup>5</sup> "Respectable girls wanted," *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, May 1874.

<sup>6</sup> T. J. Dunning, "Obituary Mary Zugg," *Bookbinders' Trade Circular* 3, no. 21 (January 1862).

unionists, Zugg and her colleagues challenged the highest echelons of political and civil society. Their infamous strike was so widely reported that it became a cornerstone for working women's agency and stayed in the memory of labour activists. Zugg died aged 33 of pulmonary disease; a common bookbinders' illness.<sup>7</sup> She was buried at Bow Cemetery, East London.<sup>8</sup> It was only in Dunning's obituary of Zugg that her name and activism were documented.<sup>9</sup> Despite Dunning's view that women should be unionized, his gendered view of women is apparent in his description of Zugg's 'womanly' temperament:

Nothing could exceed the temper, moderation and firmness she displayed. Possessing great energy, strong sense and great acuteness of perception, detecting at a glance pretence from reality, she was not what was termed a strong-minded woman, commanding great respect and affection for her goodness of heart and great regard for the feelings and welfare of others endeared her to all.<sup>10</sup>

This prosopography shows how Zugg's agency during these formative years of women's trade unionism influenced the subsequent development of trade unionism in East London. In 1874, the first formal national women's trade union movement was initiated under the auspices of the League. The League changed its name three times in conjunction with its changing political orientation. It continued until 1921, when it became the Women's Section of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), with two women's places on its General Council. In 1906, the League supported the formation of the National Federation of Women Workers until the Federation merged in 1920 with the National Union of General Workers. In 1889, the Women's Trade Union Association also aided the formation of women's trade

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<sup>7</sup> T. J. Dunning, "Obituary Mary Zugg" in *Bookbinders Trade Circular* 1861.

<sup>8</sup> "Deaths England & Wales 1837-2007, East London, vol. 1c, 18, accessed December 12 2019, <http://search.findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>9</sup> T. J. Dunning, "Obituary Mary Zugg," *Bookbinders' Trade Circular* 3 (21 January 1862).

<sup>10</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement*. (London: Ernest Benn, 1977). 47-48.

unions, specifically in East London, between 1889 and 1897. The following trade unionists were part of these organizations.

### **Bookfolder, Miss Eleanor Whyte (1824-1914)**

Eleanor Whyte, born in 1824, was another of the first generation of the trade union secretaries' network. Whyte's father and brother were bookbinders, and her sisters, Anne and Frances, and herself were bookfolders. She lived most of her life with her family in Blue Cross Street, St Martins in the Fields, Strand, until, when in her 60s, she moved with her sister Ann to Frith Street, St Anne, Soho.<sup>11</sup> Both addresses were in easy walking distance to her places of work and East London. Whyte worked with her family at the same company until 1878. She then moved to the honourable company, Messrs Riviere & Son, Regent Street, where she worked as a forewoman.<sup>12</sup> Although she enjoyed relative security, her livelihood could well have been threatened during the economic troughs. There is no evidence of her political activism until the mid-1870s. Working in the same trade as Zugg, it is likely that she followed the bible binders' strike and knew of Zugg's union leadership. Whyte was one of the initial members of the first trade union organized by the League, the Society of Women Employed in Bookbinding. As a working bookfolder, Whyte had the requisite practical working experience to represent women workers and took over as the Society's Secretary in April 1875, from the League's founder, Emma Paterson.<sup>13</sup>

Whyte spent a lot of time in East London galvanising women workers to unionize. She shared her political feminist standpoint at many meetings. According to the Fabian socialist Elizabeth Leigh Hutchins, Whyte was 'imbued with Paterson's prejudice against the Factory Act'. Whyte resisted legal restrictions upon labour and refused to join with men in making demands on employers, lobby for protective

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<sup>11</sup> "HO17, England, Wales & Scotland 1841 census, 1851, RG10 England, Wales & Scotland 1871 census, RG12 England, Wales & Scotland 1891 census," accessed September 6 2016, <http://search.findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>12</sup> "Miss Whyte," *The Times* (London, England), March 31 1914, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 12; Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 16.

legislation or participate in the agitation between 1891 and 1894 to reduce the working day to eight hours.<sup>14</sup> Whyte's suspicions of protective legislation, including that of the demands for equal pay, lay in her fear that women would be ousted from the labour market.<sup>15</sup> She actively sought out platforms, such as the middle-class anti-protective legislation campaigning organization, Women's Employment Defence League (WEDL), which was supported by Society for Promoting Employment of Women (SPEW). By 1895, Whyte was WEDL's Soho branch's Secretary and hosted WEDL in her home.<sup>16</sup> Whyte did not accept her lowness in society and was not inhibited from approaching or challenging the political and civil societies, or from espousing her minority views to male trade unionists and the middle-class labour movement.<sup>17</sup>

Whyte attended every annual Trade Union Congress and numerous meetings throughout the country, many of which were documented in the League's *Women's Union Journal* and in local, regional and national newspapers. She often spoke supporting resolutions for suffrage and female inspectors. In 1891, Whyte spoke on 'how trade unionism raises the social as well as the industrial position of women'.<sup>18</sup> At a trade union meeting in Sunderland, she stated that the only remedy for workers was to be united with the '57,000 women unionists'.<sup>19</sup> In 1894, as the representative of the London Society of Women Employed in Printing and Bookbinding, she was almost alone in raising 'women's questions'.<sup>20</sup> Towards the end of her life, she stated that equality of the sexes could be achieved through women's right to political

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<sup>14</sup> B. L. Hutchins and Amy Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1903).

<sup>15</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 65.

<sup>16</sup> "The New Factory Workshop Bill: Women's Employment Defence League," *Shafts: a magazine for progressive thought* 3, no. 3 (June 1895): 38.

<sup>17</sup> "The new factory and workshop bill: Women's Employment Defence League to the working women of England!" *Shafts: a magazine for progressive thought* 3, no. 3, June 1895, 38.

<sup>18</sup> "Trade Union Congress," *The Times* (London, England), September 7 1891, 4; "The Labour Parliament," *The North Eastern Daily Gazette*, Monday September 7 1891; "Factory inspectors," *Western Daily Press*, Thursday 4 September 1890.

<sup>19</sup> "Women and trades unionism: meeting at the Rye Hill Chapel," *Newcastle Courant*, Saturday September 12 1891, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 47.

citizenship. In 1898, when her employer's firm burned down, she wrote to *The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* describing them as 'good employers' because they paid their employees a full week's wage and ensured them of a place to work on the following Monday.<sup>21</sup>

In 1900, the TUC standing orders were suspended out of respect for the 77-year-old Whyte to speak. She was 'indistinctly' heard stating:

...existing restrictions on women's work were unfair and...limited women's scope of usefulness... and hope women would receive more consideration from men, and women be allowed a freer voice in the management of society's affairs.<sup>22</sup>

The 1901 TUC applauded Whyte in recognition of her 25<sup>th</sup> Congress attendance, at which she seconded women's suffrage resolution.<sup>23</sup> Although her views were not always popular, her tenacity was respected. She continued as secretary to the Society of Women Bookbinders until a few months before her death in 1913.<sup>24</sup> The Society, which had been diminishing since 1909, then dissolved.<sup>25</sup> Although born in 1824, Whyte was active alongside the second and third generation of women trade unionists active East London. The second generation includes Jeanette Wilkinson, Elizabeth Mear, Rosa Mariner and Amie Hicks.

### **Carpet sewer, Miss Jeannette Gaury (or Gawry) Wilkinson (1841-1886)**

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<sup>21</sup> Eleanor Whyte, "Generous employers," *The Englishwoman's review of social and industrial questions* 29, 238 (July 15 1898): 184.

<sup>22</sup> "Trade Union Congress: women workers," *York Herald*, Saturday September 8 1900.

<sup>23</sup> "Women's suffrage," *Sheffield Independent*, Saturday September 7 1901, 8.

<sup>24</sup> "Pioneer work," *The Globe* (London, England), Tuesday March 31 1914.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* (London: Virago, 1984), 12; Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 16.

Jeannette Wilkinson was born in Bermondsey, Surrey, into a large family. Her father was a foreman clerk in a large merchant's warehouse.<sup>26</sup> She was privately educated, but, in 1858, from the age of 17, she made her living as an upholsterer and sewed carpets for 14 years.<sup>27</sup> Her trade undermined her fragile health and affected her joints to the point where she found writing difficult. During the day she worked, and during the evening she studied to become a teacher. She attended Birkbeck Institute and won first prize for political economy at the Art Society examination.<sup>28</sup> At the Birkbeck Institute, she was taught by Joseph Hiam Levy, who was the son of an Aldgate slop worker. Wilkinson did achieve her aim of teaching in an elementary school for two years in a poor neighbourhood. However, it taxed her health too much and so she resigned.<sup>29</sup> Levy was the Secretary of the Vigilance Association for Defence of Personal Rights, which oversaw Acts that infringed individuals' rights and liberties. He found Wilkinson a position working for the organization, but she was not suited to the post.<sup>30</sup> Wilkinson returned to working as an upholsterer. On 8 April 1875, under the auspices of the League, the Society of Upholsterers was formed. Wilkinson joined in 1876 and later that year became the Society's paid secretary until she resigned in 1883.

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<sup>26</sup> "HO17, Bermondsey England, Wales & Scotland 1841 census; RG09 district London City 3 England, Wales & Scotland 1861, RG10 England, Wales & Scotland 1871 census, RG11, Andrew Holborn England, Wales & Scotland 1881 census, RG12 England, Wales & Scotland 1891 census," accessed September 6 2016, <http://search.findmypast.co.uk>; Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 16.

<sup>27</sup> "Lady Delegates," *London Evening Standard*, Tuesday September 16 1884; June Hannam, "Wilkinson, Wilkinson Gaury (1841-1886)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed March 19 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50738>.

<sup>28</sup> "Society of Arts," *The Examiner*, Saturday July 14 1873.

<sup>29</sup> "A very great loss..." *Weekly Dispatch* (London, England), Sunday August 29 1886; "Jeannette G. Wilkinson," *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 11 September 1886; Miss Eliza Orme, "Obituary Miss Jeanette Wilkinson," *Manchester Times*, no. 1524, Saturday September 25 1886; Miss Eliza Orme, "Obituary for Jeanette Wilkinson," *Englishwoman's Review* (London, England), September 1886.; J.H. Levy, "Jeannette G. Wilkinson," *Women's Union Journal* (September 1866).

<sup>30</sup> June Hannam, "Jeannette Gaury Wilkinson(1841-1886)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [accessed 19/03/2019]. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50738>

Wilkinson attended many meetings in East London to galvanize women's trade unionism. Like Whyte, she was especially active in encouraging the tailoresses to organize. She often took issue with the representation of the working class and publicly retorted to an article that likened needlewomen to the criminal class, who were too ignorant to be domestic servants, stating that 'many prefer liberty to semi-starvation'.<sup>31</sup> She wrote various articles under the pseudonym of "O.T." ("One of those who cannot be taught") and, between 1874 and 1884, was in 'inky warfare' with unionist John W. Overton, personified as Caliban. Wilkinson took issue with Caliban's 'philistine and near sighted' misogynistic view that working women should not neglect their domestic duties and wrote: 'I emphatically say no... all women do not instinctively take to housework any more than all men take to one trade, and a good deal of married misery is caused by overlooking that fact'.<sup>32</sup> She recognized that working women's double burden constrained trade union and political activism, stating:

...the working woman has always two days' work to do in the twenty-four hours. Her time available for public interests is therefore shorter than a man's, and the public house, still used ...as an office by the men's unions is unfortunately not considered available to women.<sup>33</sup>

As 'a speaker of tact and power', she represented the Society nine times at the TUC.<sup>34</sup>

Her small, frail figure stirred their hearts and held their attention fixed, while she dwelt with lucid argument, mixed with flashes of humour, on those questions relating to the industrial and political position of women which interested her sympathetic nature above, all other questions...

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<sup>31</sup> "Wilkinson, East End needlewomen," *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Saturday August 2 1884.

<sup>32</sup> Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 3 (2017): 585-618 (590).

<sup>33</sup> Edith Simcox, "Women's work and women's wages," *Longman's magazine* 10, no. 52 (July 1887): 265.

<sup>34</sup> "A Brave Solider in the Fight," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday September 2 1886 Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 25-26.

her eloquence was inspired by her practical experiences of the life of working women, and the sympathy and the accurate knowledge which she drew from the same source gave her an influence in public and private life.<sup>35</sup>

Eliza Orme toured the mining districts with Wilkinson and noted that she combined short 'pithy' sentences in a 'chain of logical argument'.<sup>36</sup> In 1883, Wilkinson stood down as the Society of Upholsterers' Secretary to become an organising secretary and lecturer for the Bristol Society for Women's Suffrage, West of England Women's Suffrage Society. She worked closely with its secretary, Helen Blackburn and continued in her support for the women's trade union movement and reported on the upholstery trade.<sup>37</sup> In 1884, she informed the Labour Commission that the trade's depression was the cause of the Society's dwindling members.<sup>38</sup> Wilkinson, like Emma Paterson and Whyte, also argued for female factory inspectors.<sup>39</sup> In 1885, she relocated to London to help organize meetings for the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS). She also joined her local Liberal Association. Wilkinson spoke on 'every scheme that would help ameliorate the condition of working women'. She was secular and often spoke on Irish home rule; a subject that was well mooted in Liberal politics. She believed that women were thrust on the world 'powerless to help themselves', but that they would be more powerful if they combined with men.<sup>40</sup>

Despite struggling with her fragile health, she continued to attend trade union and suffrage meetings right up to just before her death in 1886, the same year as her

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<sup>35</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 16; Eliza Orme, "Obituary for Miss Jeanette Wilkinson," *Englishwoman's Review* (London, England), September 1886

<sup>36</sup> Orme, "Obituary for Miss Jeanette Wilkinson,"

<sup>37</sup> Hannan, "Jeannette G Wilkinson(1841-1886)."

<sup>38</sup> Wilkinson, "Upholstresses' Trade Society," *Woman's Union Journal* (1884) 92.

<sup>39</sup> Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50.3 (2017) 585-618 (590); Jeannette Wilkinson, "Inspection of workshops in London," *Woman's Union Journal* (1885).

<sup>40</sup> "Meeting of the Upholsterers' Society," *The Women's Union Journal* (London, England), 136 (May 1 1887): 33.

friend, Emma Paterson died, aged 45.<sup>41</sup> Orme's obituary of Wilkinson describes her as a:

...working woman, remarkable for her self-devotion to, and self-education for, high and responsible duties, who rendered important services to the cause of women in more than one branch of labour. She was regarded with great esteem and affection by all who knew her and her labours in connection with the Women's Protective and Provident League and the Upholsterers' Society.<sup>42</sup>

Such was her influence that Orme's obituary was republished for a Manchester audience.<sup>43</sup> Her loss was 'severely felt'.<sup>44</sup>

### **Upholsterer, Miss Elizabeth Mears (1841-1895)**

Elizabeth Mears followed her parents into the trade of upholstery at an early age. Her father, C. J. T. Mears, was born in 1815 in Middlesex, and her mother, Elizabeth, was born in 1812 in Surrey. They lived with her aunt, Ann Merriot (born 1802), in Kilburn. She worked with her 'clever' upholsterer mother at Messrs Johnston & Jeanne for 40 years and then worked at Messrs Gregory until a few days before her death.<sup>45</sup> According to the 1881 census, she was living with her family at Stanhope Street, St Pancras.<sup>46</sup> In 1875, at the age of 34, she became a founding member of the Society of Upholsterers. Initially, she was sacked for speaking out publicly of workers' exploitation. She was later re-employed. When Wilkinson resigned in 1883, Mears became the Society's secretary. She often supported her

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<sup>41</sup> "St Saviour Southwark, vol. 1D, 80, England & Wales deaths 1837-2007," accessed September 6 2016, <http://search.findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>42</sup> Orme, "Obituary for Miss Jeanette Wilkinson," *Englishwoman's Review* (London, England), September 1886.

<sup>43</sup> Eliza Orme, "Obituary for Miss Jeanette Wilkinson," *Manchester Times*, Saturday September 25 1886.

<sup>44</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 16; Orme, "Obituary for Miss Jeanette Wilkinson," *Englishwoman's Review* (London, England), September 1886.

<sup>45</sup> "Miss Mears [obituary]," *The Women's Trade Union Review* 17 (April 1 1895).

<sup>46</sup> "RG10 Pancras 1871 England, Scotland & Wales census; RG11 Pancras 1881 England, Scotland & Wales census," accessed December 10 2015, <http://www.findmypast.ac.uk>.

friends, working dressmakers, Miss Leymour, Mrs Houlton and Miss Addis in their encouragement of garment makers to unionize by recounting the Society of Upholsterers' unionizing experiences. Mears remained the Society's secretary until its dissolution in 1894, one year before she died.

Unlike Whyte, Mears was a staunch supporter of protective legislation. She was part of the deputation to the Home Secretary to lobby for the Employers Liability Bill. Speaking from personal experience, she informed the Labour Commission in 1891 of the substitution of adult women by girls, the worsening working conditions and long hours. She highlighted how, despite the Factory Acts, women were forced to work extra hours. She also lobbied for female inspectors and drew their attention to the many unchecked abuses in the workplace.<sup>47</sup> Alongside Whyte, Mears spoke on how 'Trade Unionism raises social as well as the industrial position of women'.<sup>48</sup> Just before she died on 28th February 1895, at the age of 54, she denounced a county council candidate as a sweater.<sup>49</sup> Mears' experiences and agency are documented in Chapters 7 and 8.

### **Tailoress and machinist, Miss Rosa Mariner (1841-1908)**

Whyte, Wilkinson and Mears, along with the aforementioned dressmakers Miss Leymour, Mrs Houlton and Miss Addis, supported the tailoress and machinist, Miss Rosa Mariner, as Secretary to the East London Tailoresses' Union (ELTU), which was formed under the auspices of the League in 1879. Rosa was born in the heart of East London in Shoreditch. Her father, Ebenezer Mariner, a tailor and a cutter, was born in Portsmouth. She had siblings, Martha Fanny and Edwin.<sup>50</sup> In

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<sup>47</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 85-86.

<sup>48</sup> "Trade Union Congress," *The Times* (London, England), September 7 1891, 4; "The Labour Parliament," *The North Eastern Daily Gazette*, Monday September 7 1891.

<sup>49</sup> "Miss Mears [obituary]," *The Women's Trade Union Review* 17 (1 April 1895).

<sup>50</sup> "1851 England Census Class: HO107; Piece: 1547; Folio: 72; Page: 12; GSU roll: 174777," accessed February 2 2021, <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>.

1871, Rosa and Edwin left London to live with Martha's family.<sup>51</sup> They returned to live with their father at 30 Sidney Square, Mile End, Old Town, where they also lived with their 12-year-old cousin, scholar, Miss Ada F. Judge.<sup>52</sup> Chapter 6 includes Mariner's agency as secretary to the ELTU, which met at her home address in the radical Jewish area.<sup>53</sup> In 1883, Mariner was replaced by middle-class Mrs Kellor as the ELTU's hon secretary. She remained living with her father in Sidney Square.<sup>54</sup> At the age of 60, she was still toiling as a machinist and died aged 67 in 1908. She is buried at Queens Road Cemetery, Waltham Forest.<sup>55</sup>

### **Shoemaker, ropemaker, midwife, Mrs Amelia (Amie) Jane Hicks (1839/40-1917)**

Mrs Amelia (Amie) Jane Hicks (nee Dicksee) became 'one of the central figures of the Labour Movement in Great Britain'. She was born in Brixton, Lambeth, to a chartist bootmaker.<sup>56</sup> Throughout her adult life, she worked in the trades as a book closer, shoemaker, confectioner and ropemaker. Along with her carpenter husband, William, she immersed herself in Socialist Labour politics.<sup>57</sup> On her mother's side she is a descendent of a North American Indian chief, to which she ascribed her quality of fearlessness.<sup>58</sup> She was bought up by her artist uncle, Thomas Dicksee, who was the father of the artist Frank Dicksee, painter of the

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<sup>51</sup> "The National Archives, Kew, London, England: 1871 England Census; Class: RG10; Piece: 4100; Folio: 62; Page: 6; GSU roll: 846706," accessed February 2 2021, <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>.

<sup>52</sup> "RG13 Mile End Old Town, England, Wales & Scotland 1881 Census", accessed July 26 2017, <http://www.findmypast.ac.uk>.

<sup>53</sup> "RG11 Mile End Old Town, England, Wales & Scotland 1861 Census", accessed July 7 2017, <http://www.findmypast.ac.uk>.

<sup>54</sup> "The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891; Class: RG12; Piece: 302; Folio: 55; Page: 5; GSU roll: 6095412; Class: RG13; Piece: 327; Folio: 79; Page: 14," accessed February 2 2021, <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>.

<sup>55</sup> "Waltham Forest Council, Walthamstow, England; Walthamstow, England; Waltham Forest Burial Registers," accessed February 2 2021, <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>.

<sup>56</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks," *Women's Penny Paper* (London, England), 5, Saturday November 24 1888.

<sup>57</sup> "RG09 1861 England, Wales and Scotland Census," accessed June 16 2016, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>58</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks," *Women's Penny Paper* (London, England), 5, Saturday November 24 1888.

celebrated picture *Harmony*.<sup>59</sup> Amie lived with her uncle until she was 14 and then returned home to help her Chartist father in his boot making business. When describing her influences, she acknowledged 'my father's mother was a woman of very advanced opinions...and used to talk to me about these things...and my ambition was to be a leader of the people'. Her grandmother did not take part in politics in the public sphere, but her father and uncles held private political and intellectual discussions with the exiled Italian, Garibaldi, and other friends who regularly visited her uncle's studio. At the age of 17, she was one of the founders of an evening school, which for two years operated in a cellar underneath the Soho Bazaar where 'rough lads and lasses have classes, lectures and music'.<sup>60</sup>

In 1861, Amie married the young pianoforte and cabinet maker, William Hicks, from Devon. By the age of 25, she had three children.<sup>61</sup> In 1864, her family travelled to Auckland, New Zealand, where they stayed for three years.<sup>62</sup> They worked hard to survive. Utilising her knowledge of the boot trade, she earned 22s per week making boots. The war had so pushed up the cost of living that they struggled to exist. Finding boot making too physically gruelling, she took to assisting her husband. She lost a baby to dysentery brought on by starvation. She was asked to take charge of a Home for Destitute Children in Auckland, but after seven months it folded due to lack of funds. It took them 12 months to save to return to England, and her husband worked for his passage.<sup>63</sup> The Hicks set up home in Camden and, over the following few years, Amie had another three children. By 1881, she had obtained a midwife

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<sup>59</sup> "Sir Frank Dicksee, *Harmony*, 1877," accessed April 1 2019, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dicksee-harmony-n01587/text-catalogue-entry>.

<sup>60</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks," *Women's Penny Paper* (London, England), 5, Saturday November 24 1888.

<sup>61</sup> "RG09 1871 England, Wales and Scotland Census," accessed June 16 2016, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>62</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks," *Women's Penny Paper* (London, England), 5, Saturday November 24 1888;

"Census RG09 1861 England, Wales and Scotland Census," accessed June 16 2016,

<http://www.findmypast.co.uk>; "RG10 1871, RG11 1881 England, Wales and Scotland Census," accessed June

16 2016, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>; "RG10 1891 England, Wales and Scotland Census," accessed June 16

2016, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>63</sup> "The Champion of Women's Trade Unions: Interview," *The Women's Herald* (London, England), 1, 1893.

certificate.<sup>64</sup> During this period, she attended debating societies and classes and, between 1880 and 1881, became acquainted with socialists and 'ever since 'worked to the best of my ability for the advancement of their cause'.<sup>65</sup>

Like Wilkinson, Hicks recognized the state's infringement of women's personal rights. She became involved in the Campaign for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act. This act endeavoured to reduce the possibility of soldiers contracting venereal disease by arresting women in the streets who were assumed to be prostitutes. The Act was enforced in streets around ports. Thus, women workers in the vicinity of East London's port would have been aware of the threat.<sup>66</sup> Hicks accused Victorian society of using the Act for the:

...blaming the ruin of the daughters of the people is not only legalised, but treated with levity as a matter of convenience, even by some of our Bishops in the House of Lords, and philanthropists are not above putting the proceeds of it in their pockets in the shape of rents for houses, which they let for the purpose of the degradation they pretend to deplore, and they never care to think that they are often the direct cause of the degradation by the miserable pittance which they pay in the shape of wages to these twice-told slaves to the present evil system. Driven first by misery and starvation to the verge of desperation, their downfall made easy by those who pay pander to the vices of the libertine and

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<sup>64</sup> According to the 1881 RG11 1881 England, Wales and Scotland Census, accessed June 16 2016, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>, William 43 years Carpenter, Joiner, Amelia 42 years with midwife certificate, Frances (daughter) born 1862 in St Pancras, Middlesex, 19 years school mistress, Alfred born 1863 in in St Pancras, Middlesex 18 years Piano forte apprentice, Margaret born 1868 in New Zealand 13 years scholar, Edith born in 1873 in St Pancras, Middlesex, 8 years scholar, Wilfred born in 1875 6 years in St Pancras, Middlesex, Edward T. Hicks born 1880 1 year in St Pancras, Middlesex [another child born in NZ and died of dysentery] address 51, Carrol Road, St Pancras.

<sup>65</sup> "The Champion of Women's Trade Unions: interview," *The Women's Herald* (London, England), 1, 1893.

<sup>66</sup> Lucy Bland, "'Purifying' the public world: feminist vigilantes in late Victorian England," *Women's History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 397-412 (397).

debauchees, the government steps in and legalises their moral murder as a matter of necessity.<sup>67</sup>

To counteract civil society's call for women workers' emigration, Hicks warned workers through her talks on her experience.<sup>68</sup> She was the first woman to sit on the London Trades Council (LTC), and as a member she advocated men and women should combine their industrial force in trade unionism. She also argued that girls should have the same access to technical education as boys.<sup>69</sup> In 1883, she joined the SDF. As one of its elder members, she became one of its most well-known speakers. In 1885, she was arrested at Dodd Street, East London, when advocating freedom of speech.<sup>70</sup> Later that year, she stood as an SDF candidate for Marylebone Schools Board 'in the defence of labour, not for the purpose of propagating Social Democratic views'. She stated that 'I know a great deal about the inconvenience which the rules cause to the working classes, and I intend (if returned) to do my utmost to make myself felt at the Board and remove these inconveniences'.<sup>71</sup> Hicks recognized workers' resentment of enforced religion and stated that religious teaching in Board Schools is a 'great injustice to teachers' and noted that:

...some may not have any belief and to compel them to teach children what they do not believe themselves was demoralising to the teacher and bad for the child who would soon perceive the teacher's heart was not in it. The parents could teach their children themselves, and then there were the Sunday schools. Religion is a matter of conscience. What we should teach children is morality. I am not an atheist, or an infidel. I believe in the great democratic teaching of Christ.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Amie Hicks, "Women and Socialism (from a working woman's point of view)," *Justice* (London, England), April 25 1885.

<sup>68</sup> "Experience as an emigrant" [in talks listing] *Justice* 1885.

<sup>69</sup> Percy L. Parker, "The Women in Hyde Park," *The Woman's Signal* (London, England), 13, 1894.

<sup>70</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 83; *The Woman Worker: official organ of the National Federation of Women Workers*, June 30 1909.

<sup>71</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks," *Women's Penny Paper* (London, England), 5, Saturday November 24 1888.

<sup>72</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks," *Women's Penny Paper* (London, England), 5, Saturday November 24 1888.

Hicks' views were clearly feminist when, as SDF executive member, she denounced SDF's view of 'manhood' suffrage as opposed to adulthood suffrage:

...as it puts aside our grand idea of 'equal justice. Equal rights, equal duties for all...what authority is found in the Social-Democracy for them to be excluding one-half the population from the rights and duties of citizens? Let them be honest and say straight out we believe in Social-Democracy when men are concerned, but there must still be a class of being subservient to men; or let them be consistent and give to every adult human being, who is not a lunatic or criminal undergoing punishment the right of citizenship. As for women being reactionary and conservative in their ideas that may be true of the middle-class women, that women of the working class will be reactionary, or conservative is not true, they have nothing to conserve, any change will be welcome. They are ignorant on many things, granted, but lift the curtain of ignorance, and let the light dawn on them, and they see with a keenness of comprehension which is not found in those surrounded by comfort and pampered by luxury. The exigency of their circumstances, the strain at which, the mind is ever kept, to make ends meet, render them better judges of character, and although with readier of wit than the average man of their class.<sup>73</sup>

In 1895, when Hicks seconded a resolution for adult suffrage, she recalled her Chartist father's work in the passing of the Reform Act 1832, which extended the franchise.<sup>74</sup>

By 1889, Hicks had turned her energies in supporting East London's women workers through the formation of the Women's Trade Union Association, and became Secretary to the Ropemakers' Union, which drew upon the wider trade union movement's support for their strike. Chapter 7 documents this experience. It

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<sup>73</sup> Amie Hicks, "Adult not manhood suffrage," *Justice* 193 (Saturday September 24 1887): 3.

<sup>74</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, 118; *Clarion*, May 19 1905.

was through the trade union movement that she met Clara James (who she later adopted into her family) and working-class trade unionist, Margaret Bondfield.<sup>75</sup> Hicks became a leading advocate for Christian temperance and, in 1893, became the Labour representative and national organizer of the British Women's Temperance Association. When she spoke at a reception for the influential American temperance advocate, Miss Frances Willard, she gave a 'vivid description of the terrible influence of public houses among the workers'.<sup>76</sup> She both challenged the upper echelons of civil and political societies and developed relationships that were mutually respectful. Writing from the Rhondda Valley, she informed temperance campaigner, Lady Henry Somerset:

...the women of the valley have responded in no uncertain manner. Last night we fastened the white ribbon on the breast of 150 wives, or daughters of miners. They have appointed their officers. The night before at a place not far off, 200 joined. They also appointed their officers, the Secretary in each case being the assistant school mistress. I see no reason why, if you come to Rhondda, as Mrs Hughes promises to do early next year, you should not be met by a band of White Ribboners 500 strong.<sup>77</sup>

Hicks also became the Superintendent of the Labour Department of the World's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>78</sup>

By 1894, Hicks had recognized that potential legislation had the power to provide permanent worker protection and helped form the Women's Industrial

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<sup>75</sup> According to the 1891 Census, William, 50 years, piano forte maker/fitter up, Amelia, 52 years, sick accoucheuse, Frances (daughter), 29 years, dressmaker, Alfred, 28 years, piano forte maker/finisher, Margareta, 25 years, tailoress braider, Edith, 19 years, tailoress, Wilfred, 16 years, silver engraver's apprentice, Ernest 11 years, scholar, and Clara G. James Amie's adopted 24-year-old daughter.

<sup>76</sup> "[Reception of Miss Frances Willard...] *Shafts: a paper for women and the working classes*, 11, January 14 1893, 172.

<sup>77</sup> "The champion of Women's Trade Unions: interview," *The Women's Herald* (London, England) 1 (1893).

<sup>78</sup> "Mrs Amie Hicks, the Leading Woman Connected with the Labour Movement in England, has Accepted the Position of Superintendent of the Labour Department of the W.C.T.U. [World's Christian Temperance Union]," *The Woman's Signal* (London, England) 89 (1895).

Council (WIC) to act as the 'poor woman's lawyer'.<sup>79</sup> In 1895, she attended a conference of the philanthropic organization, the National Union of Women Workers that advocated women workers should be returned to the protection of their homes. Hicks rejected Lady Sandford's view that working women could not be trusted with the vote.<sup>80</sup> In 1909, at the age of 70, she retired as WIC's Vice-President.<sup>81</sup> However, she continued to oversee the Association's clubs committee and, in 1910, became the Vice-President of the National Organisation of Girls' Clubs.<sup>82</sup> In 1914 Amie was supporting the East London Federation of Suffragettes.<sup>83</sup> She lived her last few years with her artist daughter, Margaretta, who was also involved in the labour movement in her own right. Hicks died in hospital of cancer in 1917.<sup>84</sup>

As Chapter 8 will document, Hicks' support for protective legislation was not to restrict women's access to employment opportunities, or the public sphere, but to improve women workers' hazardous working conditions. She demanded working-class women's education and their enfranchisement in political society as citizens. All of her children were politicized and became politically active. The third generation of women trade union secretaries included her daughter, tailoress Miss Frances Hicks, alongside tailoress Mrs Marian Curran, née Barry, and her adopted daughter, confectioner Miss Clara Grace (Claire) James.

### **Tailoress, Mrs Marian Curran, née Barry (1871-1911)**

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<sup>79</sup> Ellen Mappen, "Helping women at work: the Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914," (London: Hutchinson in association with The Explorations in Feminism Collective, 1985), 163.

<sup>80</sup> London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, National Union of Women Workers, *Official report of the annual meeting of the general committee of the National Union of Women Workers held at the Mechanics Hall, Nottingham October 25th 1895*, National Union of Women Workers (London, 1895). Archives of National Union of Women Workers.

<sup>81</sup> Sarah Cooke, *Because we have striven: the story of a socialist pioneer. Amie Hicks 1839-1917*, (Cornwall: the author, [n.d.]) 15

<sup>82</sup> *Englishwoman's year book and directory* (1914).

<sup>83</sup> *Women's Trade Union Review* 10 (July 1 1893): 18; Rosemary Taylor, *In letters of gold: the story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 32.

<sup>84</sup> "Death of Mrs. Amie Hicks', *Justice* (February 15 1917).

Marian Barry was born in Skibbereen, Co. Cork, Ireland. She was the eldest of the six daughters and two sons of tailor John Barry and his tailoress wife, Mary, née Ronan. Marian travelled independently to London and, in the 1890s, was living in London at 12 Charles Square, Hoxton, and was working as a tailoress. In 1895, she became a League member and secretary of the East End Branch of the more militant Amalgamated Society of Tailors (AST). Chapter 7 reveals her role in East London's labour movement. In 1896, she became the assistant secretary to the League and attended the TUC as a League observer. When Barry replaced the League's provincial organizer, Miss Marland, in 1896/7, she undertook an intensive schedule in Britain and Ireland.<sup>85</sup> Her first meeting was at a Gloucester vinegar and pickle factory where she formed a union of 200 girls. In May 1896, Barry spoke at a meeting of laundresses, held under the auspices of the Gasworkers Union. It is at this meeting that she may have met her future husband, leader of the Union, Peter Francis Curran (1860–1910). In March 1897, she presided over the Amalgamated Twinespinners, Dressers, and Net Braiders Society first annual tea followed by a concert and ball in Rutland.<sup>86</sup> In May 1897, she was nominated by the London Trade Council (LTC) and elected to the Technical Education Board of the London County Council (LCC).<sup>87</sup> In August 1897, she supported the electrical workers' strike in Wolverhampton.<sup>88</sup>

From 1898 until 1905, Barry was less politically active. In 1905, she attended the funeral of the League's President, Lady Emilia Dilke, as Mrs Pete Curran. She then returned to representing the League. In 1906, she helped the NASL with the *Daily News*' Sweated Industries Exhibition, which highlighted East London's women workers' exploitative sweated labour.<sup>89</sup> See Figure 26 below for the exhibition's catalogue.

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<sup>85</sup> Norbert C., Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978) 46.

<sup>86</sup> "Twinespinners", *The Lincoln Rutland & Stamford Mercury* (Stamford, England), issue 10572, Friday 3 1897, 5.

<sup>87</sup> "The Schools Board," *Daily News* (London, England), Tuesday May 11 1897.

<sup>88</sup> "Ladies Column," (Aberdeen Scotland), Wednesday August 4 1897.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Mudie-Smith, *Handbook of the Daily News Sweated Industries Exhibition* (London: *Daily News*, 1906).



**Figure 26: Catalogue of the *Daily News* Sweated Industries Exhibition**

(Source: The Museum of London)

In 1907, the Curran family moved to Jarrow where she organized her husband's successful election campaign as Jarrow Labour Party's MP. In 1908, she was elected to the Labour Party's women's platform, the Women's Labour League's (WLL) executive committee. With other Labour women, she founded the Jarrow branch of the WLL, which listed women's suffrage as an aim. She called the Labour Party 'the men's party'. She apologized in her report to the League (now known as the Women's Trade Union League) that 'owing to the suddenness with which we were thrown into the by-election at Jarrow, I was unable to send in my notes for the last quarter'.<sup>90</sup> As part of the WLL, she campaigned for school meals and formed part of the organizing committee for the Women's Labour Day 1909 exhibition. Peter

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<sup>90</sup> *Women's Trade Union Review*, 35, October 1907.

Curran made sweated work the focus of some of his parliamentary questions and was also a supporter of women's suffrage. It is unclear how they supported themselves financially because MPs were unpaid at that time. In 1910, Peter lost the election and they moved with their four children back to Walthamstow, East London where Peter died.

Thereafter, Curran confined her trade union organizing to occasional support for new staff and was active on Hackney Labour Exchange. Christine Collette notes that Marian was an important figure in the group of women working with female labour in London, but her profile was low in comparison with the likes of Margaret MacDonald. Perhaps this was because of her personality or perhaps, as Collette suggests, it was her class.<sup>91</sup> Maybe her independent Irish spirit was too strong for the League's President, Lady Dilke. Indeed, despite her active participation and position in the League, her name does not overly appear in the League's reports.

### **Tailoress, Miss Frances Hicks (1862-1928)**

Frances, daughter of Amie Hicks, was born into the radical working-class Hicks family. The family lived in Camden, close to East London. During the 1880s, she set up a school, which she was forced to close because her family's political activities became renowned. She then trained as a tailoress. In 1896, as revealed in the previous chapter, her sweated experience as a tailoress influenced her trade union activism.<sup>92</sup> Along with her family, she joined the SDF in 1884. Chapters 7 and 8 document her life as a key trade union activist, who encouraged tailoresses to unionize through the League, the Association and the Amalgamated Society of Tailors. In 1894, she helped initiate the London Tailoresses Union, which helped local branches form, such as the Jewish Ladies' Tailors' & Mantlemakers' Union in

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<sup>91</sup> Christine Collette, "Curran, Marian (b.1871)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed April 16 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

<sup>92</sup> "Frances Hicks, 'Dressmakers and tailoresses,'" in *Workers on their industries*, ed. Frank Wallis Galton (London: Swan SonnenSchen & Co, Ltd, 1896), 13-31; Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, 36.

Whitechapel.<sup>93</sup> She became part of the anti-sweating movement as she railed against exploitative sweated government contracts.

Frances Hicks was elected to the London Trade Council in 1893 and joined the Technical Board of the London County Council in February 1894.<sup>94</sup> In 1894, she spoke at a large demonstration for the Employers Liability Bill organized by the LCC. In the same year, she became WIC's General Secretary on a salary of £100 per annum. She resigned after she married her adopted sister's, Clara James, brother, sailor Henry Joseph James, on 28 September 1895.<sup>95</sup> However, she continued as secretary to WIC's organization committee and gave lectures on technical education and the Factory Acts.<sup>96</sup> When she described the corporeal agency and confidence of unskilled female factory workers in their local streets, she implied that she did not see herself in the same light.<sup>97</sup> There is less evidence of her trade union activism after 1900, but, in 1914, alongside her mother she supported the East London Federation of Suffragettes.<sup>98</sup> See Figures 27 and 28 for images of Frances and her mother, Amie Hicks.

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<sup>93</sup> Clementina Black, "The chocolate-makers' strike," *Fortnightly Review*, August 1890.

<sup>94</sup> Joyce Bellamy and James Schmeichen, "Hicks, Amelia (Amie) Jane (1839/40-1917): Socialist and trade unionist," in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, eds. Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>95</sup> "Women's Industrial Council, *Annual report, 1894-5*; Taken from the Hicks family bible," in Sarah Cooke, *Because we have striven: the story of a socialist pioneer, Amie Hicks 1839-1917* (Cornwall: the author, [n.d.]), 10; Joyce Bellamy, and James Schmeichen, "Hicks, Amelia (Amie) Jane (1839/40-1917): Socialist and trade unionist," in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>96</sup> Bellamy and Schmeichen, "Hicks, Amelia (Amie) Jane (1839/40-1917): Socialist and trade unionist."

<sup>97</sup> Frances Hicks, "Factory girls," in *The New Party*, ed. Andrew Reid ([s.l]: [s.n.] (1895), 219-226 (224).

<sup>98</sup> *Women's Trade Union Review* 10 (July 1 1893): 18; Rosemary Taylor, *In letters of gold: the story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 32.



MRS. AMIE HICKS.

**Figure 27: Amie Hicks (left), Frances Hicks (right).** Photograph provided by and included with permission from owner Sarah Cooke

**Figure 28: Drawn image taken from “Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks”.** Image likely to have been drawn by her daughter Margaretta Hicks for the *Women’s Penny Paper*, 5, Saturday 24 November 1888

### **Confectioner, Miss Clara Grace (Claire) James (1866-1954)**

Miss Clara Grace (Claire) James was born in Kent and was the orphaned daughter of a journeyman tailor, George James, and his wife Mary. James was brought up by an alcoholic employee of her father. In 1881, at 15 years old, James was working as a box maker. In 1887, she managed to find a job as a confectionery worker. She was sacked in 1889 when she joined the Women’s Trade Union Association. From then on, she was involved in trade union activism.<sup>99</sup> Lilian Gilchrist Thompson was so impressed by James that she paid the Association James’ salary to organize the box makers. However, despite her many years’ industrial experience and contacts with workers, she struggled to unionize the box makers; the majority of whom were home workers. In 1890, she initiated her attempts to organize the confectioners. Chapter 7 documents her role as the general secretary for the East London Confectioners’ Union and her intersection in political platforms. By this point she had met the Hicks family and, by February 1891, at the age of 25, she became

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<sup>99</sup> Gerry Holloway, "James, Clara Grace (1866-1954)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed November 29 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

protected as an adopted daughter of the Hicks.<sup>100</sup> Whether a formal, or informal adoption, it perhaps indicates her need for family security.<sup>101</sup>

In 1892, James found employment as a typist. She had become a good swimmer and gymnast and, in 1893, Gilchrist Thompson supported her in her gymnastic and swimming training. She then paid her salary to set up factory girls' classes and industrial clubs to teach trade unionism and workers' rights, alongside the importance of health and exercise. James, like the Hicks, supported calls for protective legislation, and workshop and factory inspectors at the Labour Commission. As she herself recognized, not all women had homes and did not argue for the return of working women to the home. Instead, she advocated the education of women to lobby and self-empower themselves.<sup>102</sup> In 1897, James directed more than 400 working girls from Rotherhithe, Homerton, Lambeth, St Pancras and Battersea in an impressive 'physical drill' to a large, crowded assembly of working women at the People's Palace in East London. They wanted to highlight how exercise and healthy dress could help combat hazardous working conditions. Nearly all the girls wore national costume and different coloured blouses, 'so that the dumb bell and other mass drills were very pretty spectacles'. James distinguished herself in an Indian costume as she 'gracefully climbed a rope'. Amie Hicks presided, and in her short address pointed out the advantages of calisthenics for those who had to earn their living in workrooms. She congratulated the girls on their 'general smartness'.<sup>103</sup>

During the early 1900s, James set up her own organization, Working Girls at Play. She later established a holiday home at Canvey Island for working girls of East

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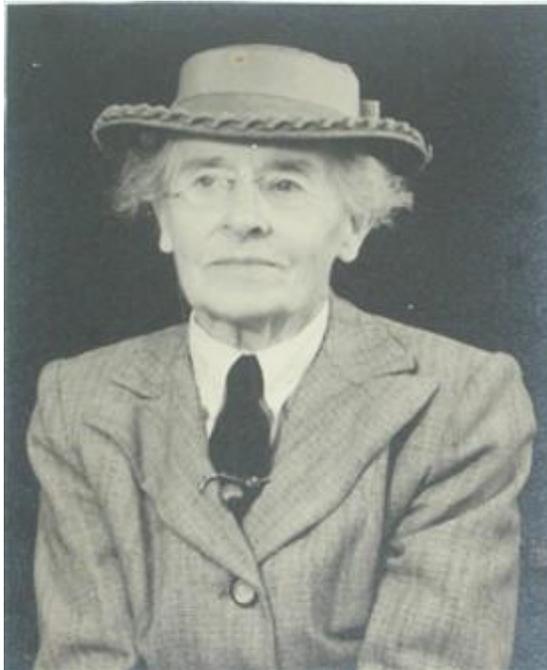
<sup>100</sup> Sarah Cooke, "Hicks family bible".

<sup>101</sup> "RG13 St Pancras 1901 England, Wales & Scotland census 1891," accessed December 10 2016, <http://findmypast.co.uk>.

<sup>102</sup> Women's Industrial Council, *Annual report, 1894-5*, 16; Women's Trade Union Review, *Fourth Annual Report 1892-3*, 12; Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918." (PhD University of Sussex, 1995), 134.

<sup>103</sup> "Working Girls from Rotherhithe, Homerton, Lambeth, St Pancras and Battersea met last night at the People's Palace," *Sunday Survey Lloyd's Weekly Newspapers*, Sunday March 28 1897; Women's Industrial Council, *Annual report, 1896-1897*, 15-17.

London. In 1901 she became ill and was sent to Switzerland to recover.<sup>104</sup> In 1906, she resigned from the Women's Industrial Council (WIC).<sup>105</sup> She spent the rest of her life on Canvey Island where she lived with her woman partner and adopted son. James became a JP, a member of the Canvey Island Women's Institute and formed a Labour Party branch.<sup>106</sup> See Figure 29 below for an image of Clara at this time.



**Figure 29: Trade Union Secretary, Clara Grace James (1867-1954)**

(Source: [http://www.canveyisland.org/page/clara\\_james\\_trade\\_unionist\\_and\\_community\\_activist](http://www.canveyisland.org/page/clara_james_trade_unionist_and_community_activist))

## Conclusion

These biographies show how industrial experience and politics orientated the development of the secretaries' selfhoods and their subsequent enactment of their feminist agency in the dynamic temporal-spatiality of East London. These individuals were not the uneducated outcasts that civil society described. They all had the prerequisite "practical" first-hand experience of industrial conditions to represent

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<sup>104</sup> Women's Trade Union Review, *Annual report, 1901-1902*, 13-14.

<sup>105</sup> Women's Industrial Council, *Annual report, 1906-7*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> "The life of Clara James," accessed September 20 2018, [http://www.canveyisland.org/page\\_id\\_179.aspx?path=0p22p54p](http://www.canveyisland.org/page_id_179.aspx?path=0p22p54p).

women union members. Most were “surplus” unmarried women, who had learned industrial skills and gained entry to their trade through their families. Both Marian Barry and Clara James were independent women with no family support close by. As industrial workers, these activists recognized that their own and others’ corporeal exploitation was political. Despite their different identities and political ideas, they manifested their agency in the hope of creating political change. Although for some of the activists their materialist agency may well have been encouraged in their homes, the political and trade union platforms provided the space for them to create their own conduits for their voices.

All of these individuals, bar Zugg and Mariner, represented their members at the London Trade Council, the TUC, state inquiries, including the Labour Commission, and attended many meetings to galvanize women workers in the East End and across the country. The fact that they were invited to speak alongside middle-class activists and representatives of the state persuaded others in civil society to listen to them. It also gave them the right to be heard when they disagreed, even challenged, the political views of people with more given power. The societies’ meetings attracted attendees, such as the influential Irish social reformer, Miss Frances Power Cobbe.<sup>107</sup> Their influence pervaded women workers’ homes and labour geographies throughout the country.

Zugg laid the foundations of this women’s network. She was active during the late 1840s and, as her biography reveals, she was not reported speaking from podiums or even writing articles in newspapers; her name barely appearing in the public sphere. Her quietness contrasts with Eleanor Whyte’s later outspoken agency. Perhaps, Zugg did not wish to impact on her family’s capacity to earn their living. Whyte’s trade unionism emerged during a later period, but her political selfhood could have formed in her earlier years. Perhaps Zugg’s agency had helped mould it. Whyte was clearly influential, given the various reports of her voice. Zugg, had she lived longer, may have learned to speak in the public sphere. The difference in their public presence is a reflection of, how by the 1870s, the political period had changed.

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<sup>107</sup> "Society of Upholsterers," *The Women's Union Journal* 16 (May 1 1877): 26.

The second-generation Elizabeth Mears, Jeanette Wilkinson and Amie Hicks, alongside Whyte, were active in East London from the 1870s. This second generation were not afraid to question the state and the middle-class hegemony in the labour movement. Whyte, Mears and Wilkinson entered trade unionism through the Women's Protective and Provident League. Whyte was the only one who was not a supporter of protective legislation. Wilkinson was the first in this network to recognize that suffrage was of equal importance to workers' rights. Perhaps her transition into the more middle-class suffrage movement influenced her Liberal politics and support for Irish home rule. Despite the Hicks' family's economic dependence upon their industrial waged work, Amie's radical family instilled in her a higher social and political identity. Politics were the cornerstone of her family home, and it moulded her selfhood and volition. Her more powerful identity gave her the confidence to assume her capacity for public speaking and her right not just to speak in the public sphere, but also to be listened to. Amie shaped the selfhood of her daughter Frances, who clearly followed in her footsteps.

The third-generation Rosa Mariner, Frances Hicks, Clara James and Marian Curran all became involved in politics as young people and became trade union representatives in their twenties. Mariner's family lived in the heart of a radical Jewish area. It is likely that this local geography impacted her selfhood and volition for political agency. Curran travelled to East London and lived independently until she married. She clearly recognized working class women's exclusion in the male trade union movement and marginalisation in the labour movement, including the Labour Party. Frances Hicks' activism had been encouraged from an early age. She clearly made use of all the trade union platforms to create a women's trade union movement. Clara James' feminist consciousness came from her own experience. She attracted the attention of the middle class, who saw her political potential to harness working-class women's political agency. Of all the trade unionists, James linked the corporeal to the political in her agency. She believed in the role of clubs for encouraging physical pursuits to inform the development of women's selfhood and volition, and the development of materialist and political agency through the corporeal. Perhaps, because she had seen working women suffer in industrial accidents where their clothes were caught in machinery, she rejected impractical and restrictive women's dress and advocated the rational dress movement.

As each person manifested their agency as part of Mouffe's "political" through the trade union and labour movements, they further developed the movements as their words and actions impacted upon the selfhoods of others. The secretaries' intersection in the different platforms saw them enlarge the labour movement and create new networks through which the broad labour movement morphed. The movement grew as subsequent generations created their own volition, materialist, political and corporeal agencies. As middle-class activist Edith Simcox stated, 'the effort to bring political liberty to the daily lives of women is not an isolated movement, nor a sudden out growth...it is part of a continuous action and reaction between law and custom...human institutions are moulded...political conscience is modified'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Helen Blackburn, *Women's suffrage: a record of the women's suffrage movement in the British Isles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1902), 4; Pauline Polkey, "Reading history through autobiography: politically active women of late nineteenth century Britain and their personal narratives," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 3 (2000): 483-500 (484).

## Chapter 5: 1840-1874: The rise of the distressed needlewoman from the anarchy of competition and her attempts at trade unionism

### Introduction

1840s' East London's labour geographies were wretched overcrowded places. Even when families resiliently avoided unemployment they were often still starving. East London became a radical hub of Christian, secular and temperance-influenced Owenite and Chartist political visions, industrial militancy and trade unionism. Working women were crucial to these democratic and working-class labour movements. The Owenite Grand National Moral Union of the Productive Classes of the United Kingdom and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union encouraged female trade unionism in London.<sup>1</sup> Owenites sought to emancipate all humanity and called for 'a multi-faceted offensive against all forms of social hierarchy'. Comparing 'misogynist unions to aristocratic oppressors' they sought to destroy male dominance through the 'democratisation of personal relations'.<sup>2</sup> Owenites believed in 'benevolent reason and practical cooperation' to overwhelm the force of 'ignorant self-interest' and economic competition'.<sup>3</sup> They argued that misery was not due to the oversupply of labour, but the mechanism of exchange which denied workers the true worth of their labour. They advocated that all the working class draw together in one consolidated mass, inclusive of the unskilled and women workers. Chartism evolved separate spheres ideology in its development of

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 37; Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 1995), 200; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the new Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (London: Virago, 1983), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 1995), 202; Anna Clark, "The rhetoric of Chartist domesticity: gender, language and class in the 1830s and 1840s," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (January 1992): 200; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the new Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993), xv, 285.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the new Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993), xiv-xv.

patriarchal ideas of respectable working-class manhood that demanded male breadwinner wages to protect women and children from industrial slavery.<sup>4</sup> While Owenites advocated gender equality, Chartism espoused domestic ideology.

Working women created conduits within these platforms for their voices, evolving feminist debates. “Infidel” feminists, middle-class Owenites, Eliza Sharples and Eliza MacCauley, rejected evangelical women’s role as part of the “uneasy classes” forced to earn money. Catherine Barmby’s 1843 tract ‘Demand for the emancipation of women politically and socially’ demanded women’s right to vote.<sup>5</sup> Tory MP, Lord Ashley, oriented the state’s paternalism through legislation to desaturate the labour market of women workers. He also led philanthropic calls for working-class self-help and provided the means for workers’ emigration. Middle-class denial of the anarchy of competition combined with male trade unionists’ belief that women workers were either “scabs” or unorganisable, left working women unprotected. Thomas Hood’s poem ‘Song for a Shirt’ became a clarion call to aid women workers:

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the new Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993), xiv, xv; Anna Clark, "The rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: gender, language and class in the 1830s and 1840s," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (January 1992): 62-88, (63, 67).

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Barmby, "The demand for the emancipation of woman, politically and socially," *New Tracts for the Times* 1, no. 3 (1843). Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the new Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 55; Laura Schwartz, *Infidel feminism: secularism, religion and women's emancipation, England 1830-1914*, (Manchester, U.K. ; New York: Manchester University Press, 2013). 46.

With fingers weary and worn,  
With eyelids heavy and red,  
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,  
Plying her needle and thread —  
Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch  
She sang the 'Song of the Shirt'.

(1<sup>st</sup> stanza of Thomas Hood's poem 'Song for a Shirt', which was first published in *Punch, or the London Charivari* on 16 December 1843.<sup>6</sup> (See Appendix 1 for the complete poem.)

## Working-class democratic and labour movements

In 1837, Chartist George Julian Harney and Owenite Charles Neesom, along with a small group of artisans, broke away from William Lovett's Chartist London Working Men's Association (LWMA). They formed the radical militant Chartist East London Democratic Association (ELDA) on Thomas Paine's birthday (9 February 1737).<sup>7</sup> ELDA initially held meetings in a room adjoining an umbrella shop in the Minories.<sup>8</sup> Both LWMA and ELDA were influenced by the National Union of the Working Classes' stance that education was the means to achieve equal political and social rights. In 1838, the LWMA created the People's Charter, which sought

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<sup>6</sup> "Thomas Hood, 'Song for a Shirt', in *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood: with a biographical sketch and notes*, ed. Epes Sargent, vol.1 (Boston: Phillip Samson & Company, 1859), accessed April 10 2019, [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Gx9IAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA147&dq=inauthor:%22Thomas+Hood%22+song+for+a+shirt&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwighrKNis\\_hAhWLTBUIHfsJAMAQ6AEIQTAE#v=onepage&q=inauthor%3A%22Thomas%20Hood%22%20song%20for%20a%20shirt&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Gx9IAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA147&dq=inauthor:%22Thomas+Hood%22+song+for+a+shirt&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwighrKNis_hAhWLTBUIHfsJAMAQ6AEIQTAE#v=onepage&q=inauthor%3A%22Thomas%20Hood%22%20song%20for%20a%20shirt&f=false).

<sup>7</sup> Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Bennett, "The London Democratic Association, 1837-41: a study in London radicalism," in *The Chartist Experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-1860*, eds. James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 88.

mass representation through the male franchise. Addressing the LWMA, Charles Neesom stated that ELDA adhered to the same five principles of national reform that Lovett had framed through the LWMA. These principles of universal suffrage, equal representation, vote by ballot, annual Parliament, and no property qualification requirement to vote or to be a parliamentary candidate became the cornerstone of Chartism. Neesom stated that ELDA's 'first objective is political and social education, and the advocacy of the rights of the oppressed'.<sup>9</sup> However, while the LWMA maintained women's inequality in the political sphere, ELDA followed Paine's 1791 advocacy that the vote would be the 'universal political right of every human being rather than as a privilege of property' as 'all working people deserved rights'.<sup>10</sup> In 1838, editor and writer of Chartist newspapers, Irishman Bronterre O'Brien, had warned that 'until woman becomes an independent creature, not the subservient slave of man, but a fit companion and assistant in all his undertakings' Chartism would not succeed.<sup>11</sup>

In January 1839, in East London, Chartist bookbinders and trade union activists, John Jaffray and Thomas Joseph Dunning, helped publish the newspaper *The Charter*.<sup>12</sup> Dunning's trade union experience of protecting exploited bookbinders in Nantwich had made him familiar with the law and had drawn him towards Chartism.<sup>13</sup> Charles Neesom's wife, Elizabeth Neesom, the only female member of ELDA, had the role of encouraging female support. It was through *The Charter's* first issue that Elizabeth took issue with LWMA's limitation of women's franchise. She told women to 'overcome timidity arising from the prejudices of false education, to

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<sup>9</sup> Bennett, "The London Democratic Association, 1837-41: a study in London radicalism," 88; Allen Davenport and John Harper, "An address to the 'Working Men's Association', from the East London Democratic Association," *The Champion and Weekly Herald* (London, England), March 26 1837.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of man* (London: J.M. Dent, 1951); Anna Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language and Class in the 1830s and 1840s." *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (January 1992) 62-88 (67)

<sup>11</sup> *True Scotsman*, December 22 1838, in Clark, "The rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: gender, language and class in the 1830s and 1840s," 79.

<sup>12</sup> P. J. M. Marks, "John Jaffray: Victorian bookbinder, Chartist and trade unionist," *eBLJ*, 16 (2014), accessed April 1 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/eblj/2014articles/pdf/ebljarticle162014.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Emma Griffen, "The making of the Chartists: popular politics and working class autobiography in early Victorian Britain," *English Historical Review* 129, no. 538 (2014): 589.

shake off this inferior status' and 'consider it our duty to cooperate with our patriotic sisters...to obtain universal suffrage in the shortest possible time'.<sup>14</sup> Her attempts to include women in the right of franchise was thwarted by the argument that the Charter should be won first.<sup>15</sup> Between 1841 and 1843, the *English Chartist Circular* reported LWMA's less feminist rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> However, women heard Elizabeth Neesom's call as they increasingly joined in the democratic movement's militancy. Charles Neesom was chairing a meeting with 'several women in a crowd of 600' when the police rushed in and found pikes.<sup>17</sup>

As ELDA grew more militant in its demands for the People's Charter, it reformed into the London Democratic Association (LDA). Many of its members were artisans and met regularly at local public houses near Abbey Street in Bethnal Green.<sup>18</sup> On 14 April 1839, Elizabeth Neesom became secretary to the London Female Democratic Association (LFDA). Sarah Broom was its chair, Mary Elizabeth Warren became treasurer and Mary Ireland, Sarah and Mary Dymmock and Elizabeth Turner were committee members. They put 'their sisters before men in their fight for universal suffrage'.<sup>19</sup> LFDA recognized the state's enclosure of women workers into disenfranchisement when they reached out to women of the 'metropolis' to: annihilate the 'inhuman', 'unjust and atrocious New Poor Law'; cooperate with women of the North in crushing the 'child-murdering factory system'; support the persecuted by the 'sovereignty's tyrant factions', and the 'principles' of the People's Charter.<sup>20</sup> On 7 May 1839, women attended a meeting of 6,000 at Clerkenwell

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Neesom, "The London Female Democratic Association: to the women of England and particularly the women of the metropolis," *The Operative* (London, England) 28 (Sunday May 12 1839): 16.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a new history*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 186; *The National Reformer*, no. 26, 5-6; *The Operative* (London, England) (November 4 1838); Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1991). 59.

<sup>16</sup> Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 64.

<sup>17</sup> "Arrest of armed Chartists at Bethnal Green," *The Southern Star and London and Brighton Patriot* (London, England), 1, Sunday January 19 1839.

<sup>18</sup> *The Charter* 1 Sunday January 27 1839: 6.

<sup>19</sup> *The Champion*, January 27 1839; *The Operative* (London, England) April 14 1839: 9.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Neesom, "The London Female Democratic Association: to the women of England and particularly the women of the metropolis," *The Operative* (London, England) Sunday May 12 1839 16.

Green. LWMA member, Mr Beniowski, who was an exiled Pole, a representative from Derby and a local weaver from Spitalfields spoke of the mass poverty. A total of 2,000 people then proceeded to another meeting where more speeches were given. Men and women were called to 'emancipate ourselves and our children from slavery'.<sup>21</sup>.

As the state's 'class-legislators' called for curbs to freedom of speech, Chartists galvanized around 'union is strength...knowledge is power'.<sup>22</sup> Despite the numbers of the attendees at the huge outdoor meetings, Chartists recognized that 'three-fourths of the working classes' were not Chartists. There were calls for collective education through newspapers.<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Neesom lived above their bookshop and newsagents at 166 Brick Lane in Spitalfields. She became part of the political force that disseminated Chartist newspapers, such as the *Leeds Advertiser* and *The Northern Star*. East London regularly featured in *The Northern Star's* column 'Trades Movements', which documented the state of trades and industrial actions nationally.<sup>24</sup> Christian Chartist women challenged the state's evangelical justification of their privilege, and the misrepresentation of the working class as immoral. They mobilized 'sisters in bondage' to rail against the maintenance of two queens who 'direct the government while we struggle'. They called to women to 'shake off lethargy, engage in a grand struggle for liberty'.<sup>25</sup> The Queens represented both class exploitation and female aspiration of power in society. Inspired by

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<sup>21</sup> From a correspondent, "London Democratic Association," *The Operative* (London, England) Sunday May 12 1839.

<sup>22</sup> "Address to the male and female Chartist Associations of Great Britain and Ireland," *The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (Leeds, England), Saturday April 25 1840.

<sup>23</sup> John H. Bell, "Address to the male and female Chartist associations of Great Britain and Ireland," *The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (Leeds, England), Saturday April 25 1840.

<sup>24</sup> *The Northern Star and Leeds Advertiser* (Leeds, England: J. Hobson for F. O'Connor, 1837-1844); *The Northern Star and National Trades Journal* (London: W. Hewitt for F. O'Connor, 1844-1852).

<sup>25</sup> Mary Grassly, "Solemn appeal to the people," *The Southern Star and London and Brighton Patriot* (London, England), Sunday February 2 1840; Hannah Ledworth and Sarah Crowley, "The address of the female chartists of Manchester to their sisters of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales," *The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (Leeds, England), 193, Saturday July 24 1841; *The Northern Star*, June 8 1839, 5; Eileen Yeo, "Christianity in the Chartist struggle, 1838-1842," *Past and Present* 91 (May 1991).

heroines, such as Joan of Arc, Chartist women reclaimed their identities as 'patriots'.<sup>26</sup>

The LFDA reformed into the East London Female Patriot Association (ELFPA). It put female education at its core for a subscription of 1d.<sup>27</sup> Before ELFPA's Monday evening meetings, Elizabeth Neesom taught its female members writing and other skills.<sup>28</sup> As some women grew militant, the Chartist poet John Watkins' political vision of the respectable mother and child protected by male breadwinner wages in a domestic idyll became ingrained in class consciousness and political identity.<sup>29</sup> Birmingham's middle-class Sophia clarified women Chartists' position:

As Chartist women, we have then a far mightier effort to make than the men of the same good name. Not only have we to assist them in the regeneration of our beloved country, but also to contend against those old prejudices which have so long militated against our improvement and consequently our happiness.<sup>30</sup>

Women Chartists proved themselves indispensable as 'worthy citizens' in their demand for parliamentary reform. They called out against the corrupt aristocratic laissez-faire capitalist exploitation 'where men were treated like beasts, or machines', whose only 'privilege is to labour and to die', and that 'women and children were industrial slaves'. Women won praise for their 'business-like manner' and were 'an example worthy of imitation by many men's associations' and 'proving

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<sup>26</sup> "Female slavery and the French heroine," *The English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales* (London, England) 1842, no. 142; *The Northern Star*, February 2 1839, 3; "The English Chartist Circular no. 143, 361-2, no. 144, 367-70," in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 183.

<sup>27</sup> "Female patriot," *The English Charter Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales* (London, England) 1842, no. 75; Chase, *Chartism: a new history*, 187; *The Chartist*, October 27 1839, 640.

<sup>28</sup> *The Northern Star*, January 30 1841, 1.

<sup>29</sup> John Watkins, "Address to the Women of England," *The English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales* (London, England), April 12 1841; Anna Clarke, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British Working Class*. (Berkeley, Calif; London: University of California Press, 1995) 245.

<sup>30</sup> Sophia, "Woman-her social and political influence," *The Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales* (London, England), April 23 1841.

the capability of woman to think and act for herself, a privilege too often denied them by men professing the most ultra-radical principles'.<sup>31</sup> Teetotal Owenite Henry Vincent and Chartist William Lovett spoke out against male hostility to women's political agency.<sup>32</sup> Vincent encouraged the view that a good wife was a radical Chartist. William Lovett's 1840 work, *Chartism, or a New Organisation of the People*, states that 'in the plan of the National Association we have provided for the admission of female members on the same condition as males'. In 1841, Lovett established the National Association of the United Kingdom for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People. The motto of its newspaper, *The National Association Gazette: the rights of man and the rights of woman*, was 'equal educational, social and political rights of woman as well as man'. Although they offered women political citizenship and equality with men, the vote remained a male right only.<sup>33</sup>

Birmingham's Sophia's article 'Education' renounced women's exclusion from learning to ensure that they were 'weak, dependent, vain and superstitious' as an excuse for their exclusion from political power. She noted:

...women's poverty has been an insurmountable bar, the same knowledge which man could gain for two and sixpence per quarter in his Mechanic's institute, a woman must pay thirty shillings for. She must not borrow one of his books under pain of subjecting him to a fine.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *The Northern Star*, December 8 1838, 6; *The Northern Star*, January 2 1841; Anna Clark, "The rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: gender, language and class in the 1830s and 1840s," *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (January 1992) 62-8(63).

<sup>32</sup> *Westerner Vindicator*, March 23 1839, 2, in Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, (London: Macmillan, 1991) 118.

<sup>33</sup> *The National Association Gazette: the rights of man and the rights of woman* no. 1., 6, 11 43,, in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 61-62.

<sup>34</sup> Sophia, "Education," *The English Chartist Circular*, June 1841.

In a letter in the *English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England*, Elizabeth Neesom also advocated women's education to fully develop their mental faculties and 'to become a thinking and strictly moral people' of 'sound political knowledge'. She recognized 'the oppressors' who perpetuate 'barbarous system of selfishness, competition and ignorance of which we have for ages been victims'. She also saw that class 'legislation' was 'partial legislation' because it deemed women as man's inferior. 'Let us women, endeavour to remove this reproach...create a social reformation that men will, through pride, be forced to excel'.<sup>35</sup> In the same newspaper Neesom also wrote a public letter in which she stated that 'alcohol is an opiate of the oppressed, which made profits for the oppressors. Abstinence implies self-assertion'. It was signed 'by the East London Female Chartist Association's members'.<sup>36</sup> Neesom reformed the organization into the East London Female Total Abstinence Chartist Association (ELFTACA). Public houses had been crucial in the development of Chartism and the temperance movement's rejection of them was fracturing the movement.<sup>37</sup>

Working women had learned to mobilize through their community experience of friendly societies. Recognizing that women needed to consolidate their voices in the Chartist movement, they formed Female Chartist Associations (FCAs).<sup>38</sup> Most had a president, a chairwoman and a treasurer to manage members' subscriptions. *The Northern Star* printed their mostly anonymous reports.<sup>39</sup> In 1839, in the heart of East London, the Tower Hamlets FCA formed with Mander May as president.<sup>40</sup> The Tower Hamlets FCA helped women run clubs that encouraged women's self-sacrifice because it would 'bear fruit for the Chartist cause...in the sight of God'.<sup>41</sup> By 1852, nationally, women had formed 150 FCAs; one ninth of which were largely anti-

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<sup>35</sup> *The English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales* (London, England) June 1841, 6.

<sup>36</sup> "Address of the East London Total Abstinence Association," *Northern Star*, January 30 1841, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Eileen Yeo, *Radical femininity: women's self-representation in the public sphere* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 260.

<sup>38</sup> Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist movement*, 198-201, 230.

<sup>39</sup> *The Chartist*, October 27 1839, Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist movement*, 198-201, 230.

<sup>40</sup> *The Operative* (London, England) April 14 1838, 9; *The Northern Star*, September 1 1838, 6.

<sup>41</sup> David Jones, "Women and Chartism," *The Journal of the Historical Association* 68, no. 222 (February 1983): 13; *The Northern Star*, September 10 1842, 5.

feminist.<sup>42</sup> Like Tower Hamlets' FCA's treasurer, Mrs Simmons, the majority of the FCAs' committee members were married and related to male Chartists.<sup>43</sup> However, close to Tower Hamlets, a Miss Mary Ann Walker formed the City of London's FCA with Miss Cleopatra Maria Susannah Inge as its secretary. Its members were mostly single women.<sup>44</sup> It could well have been the central London FCA with '1300 members', many of whom, given its location, may well have been middle-class uneasy working women.<sup>45</sup> Their regular meetings at the National Charter Hall were widely reported.<sup>46</sup> East London's female Chartists met in homes and public houses, such as the Blue Bell in Dalston, the Albion in Bethnal Green and the Democratic Rooms, and in local coffee-houses. Inge endeavoured to act as a corresponding agent between them.<sup>47</sup>

Walker's first lecture recognized the want in homes when it called upon 'female class' propagators of Chartism.<sup>48</sup> Walker and Inge became renowned "Hen Chartists" as they recognized male bias in women's slavery and demanded women's political rights, voice and suffrage.<sup>49</sup> While they won male and female supportive cheers, they were also criticized by female Chartists for questioning male Chartist leadership and were subjected to misogynist retorts.<sup>50</sup> The *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* described them as 'Petticoat Politicians' and the 'better half of the tumultuous classes'.<sup>51</sup> Not all women identified themselves when they joined in

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<sup>42</sup> Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist movement*, 198-201, 230.

<sup>43</sup> *The Northern Star*, August 21 1841, 5, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *The Northern Star*, September 1 1843, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *The Northern Star* 1 Sept 1838, 6.

<sup>46</sup> "The female Chartists again," *The Examiner*, Saturday November 29 1842.

<sup>47</sup> David Jones, "Women and Chartism," *The Journal of the Historical Association* 68, no. 222 (February 1983): 11.

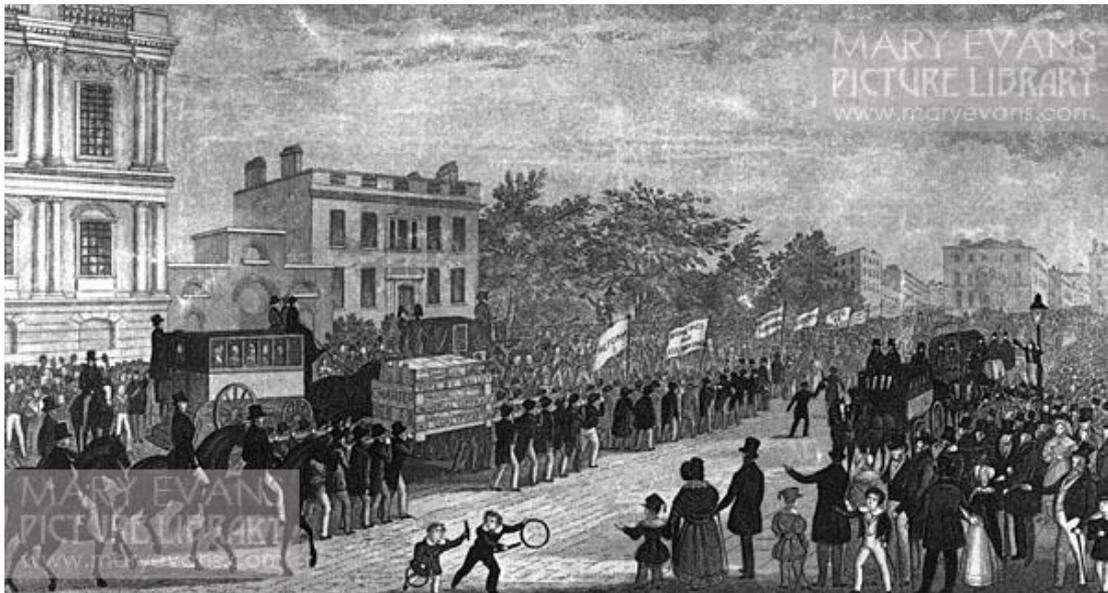
<sup>48</sup> *The Northern Star*, July 2 1842, 7; *The Northern Star*, August 26 1847.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, October 20 1842, 3; October 22 1842, 4; October 25 1842, 6; *The Northern Star*, November 5 1842, 1; December 12 1842, 7; July 27 1843, 2; August 26 1843, 1; September 2 1843, 1; *The English Charter Circular*, December 10 1842.

<sup>50</sup> "Meeting of female Chartists," *The Times*, Tuesday October 20 1842; "Meeting of female Chartists," *Caledonian Mercury*, October 24 1842; Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 221.

<sup>51</sup> "Petticoat Politicians," *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, Saturday October 29 1842, 2.

discussions. In 1843, Marion Reid used the pseudonym “Vita” when writing to *The Northern Star* to complain of the male bias of Chartism.<sup>52</sup> Despite the tug of war between class versus sex, Chartist women pushed their male relatives to react against diminishing working conditions and unemployment. James Epstein estimates that, in 1841, 8,000 Chartist memberships were taken up. Female Chartists collected signatures for the 1839, 1842 and 1848 petitions. Yet only 8,200 of every 100,000 signatures in the 1842 petition were female.<sup>53</sup> Despite women’s role in collecting the signatures, the petition was presented by men, as seen in Figure 30 below.



**Figure 30: A print of the May 1842 Chartist procession taking the great national petition of 3,317,702 signatures to the House of Commons**

(Source: Marx Memorial Library/Mary Evans Picture Library)

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<sup>52</sup> Mrs Hugo Reid, *A Plea for Woman* (Edinburgh, 1843), in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 59; Jennifer Bennett, "The London Democratic Association, 1837-41: A Study in London Radicalism." In *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860*, edited by James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson, 87-119. (London: Macmillan Press, 1982). 60.

<sup>53</sup> David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)., 68-87, 111-123, 129-141; Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist movement*, 230; Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and Trade Unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement*. (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 5

Perhaps the Owenite recognition that ‘a woman has been a slave of a slave’ was proving too true because Chartist women’s numbers started to fall.<sup>54</sup> In January 1845, in the heart of radical artisanal East London, the Chartist-influenced Boot and Shoemakers Mutual Protection Society met at a public house, the Standard of Liberty, in Brick Lane. Given that it was below the Neesoms’ home, they could well have attended. The meeting, when discussing the emancipation of their trade from low wages and employer oppression, recognized that belief in urban political solutions and trade unions was waning. Workers feared infiltration of government spies at their meetings as the state feared “democrats” in trade unions. Women were turning to the Chartist Land Company, which advocated that 13,000,000 acres of uncultivated land should be given to the unemployed.<sup>55</sup>

A return to the rural idyll offered more hope than life in an urban labour geography. Yet militancy continued. In 1848, women Chartists in Bethnal Green described the want that drove their futile resistance and the class violence they endured. They proclaimed ‘it was hard to bear the pangs of hunger, but it is harder still to know that the only remedies to be afforded are the sabre's gash and truncheon's blow’.<sup>56</sup> *Punch* had little sympathy and stated that Walker and Inge should ‘disperse the largest and most ferocious crowd of females that ever was collected’. Mayhew noted that starvation drove women to be ‘dangerous’.<sup>57</sup> Such articles, while belittling women, made women’s agency more visible and indicated how threatened the state felt.<sup>58</sup>

Although Owenism did not gain the same working-class support as Chartism, it did raise feminist debate on the institution of marriage and separate spheres

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<sup>54</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century*, (London: Virago, 1983) xiv; *The People* no. 21, 161, in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> “Trades Movement,” *The Northern Star and National Trades’ Journal* (Leeds, England), Saturday January 25 1845.

<sup>56</sup> *The Northern Star*, July 8 1848, 1, in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 93.

<sup>57</sup> *The Northern Star*, July 8 1848, 1, in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 93.

<sup>58</sup> Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in protest 1800-1850*, (London: Croom Helm, 1982).75, 112,122-3.

ideology.<sup>59</sup> In 1848, Owenism lost more working-class support when it restructured itself into an evangelical Rational Society, which opposed the People's Charter. It deemed the working classes incapable of democratic rights or organizing without middle-class leadership.<sup>60</sup> Marx moved the central axis of Socialism from early Owenism to a class struggle between capital and labour with only a vague offer of improving women's status after the revolution.<sup>61</sup> Although, Marx did not recognize the dualism of patriarchal and capitalist oppression, working women evidently did. Given the omnipresent fear of violent class oppression and hunger, for most women the goal of a healthier subsistence was more pressing than feminist liberation. Many may have had difficulty in imagining the reality of what educational and political equality would be. It was in this context that the women bible binders working in St Bride on the edge of East London had resorted to trade unionism to improve their working conditions.

### **Bibles and brothels: the 'scripture slaves' production of 'cheap bibles' and their trade unionism**

Victorian evangelical society deemed that all should have access to religion, but the Religious Tract Society (RTS), formed in 1799, found that this was not the case. The RTS believed that the Anglican Society for the Promoting of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was not printing enough cheap bibles for England, or the British Empire's growing heathen working-class population. In 1804, with the support of the MP William Wilberforce (Chaplain to Prince Albert), the Thornton family and Lord Ashley, the RTS created the publisher, the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). As BFBS set up its printing presses, it sent three unpaid secretaries to drum up trade. As they travelled through Britain and abroad, they created BFBS auxiliary societies. These religious missionary societies created a huge demand for cheap bibles. Working under the premise that it was not a religious society, BFBS was able to print and distribute many different types of bibles. It set up a printing committee to

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<sup>59</sup> Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century*, xiv, *The People*, no. 21, 161, in Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 57.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century*, 261.

<sup>61</sup> Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, 240.

select presses to print different bibles in different languages, including colonial Portuguese, Tamil and Arabic languages.<sup>62</sup> BFBS became so successful that it became SPCK's chief rival.<sup>63</sup>

Printing durable bibles in various sizes and bindings was highly skilled and complicated, and therefore a slow and expensive process.<sup>64</sup> Cheap plain bibles were printed for schools and the poor. Expensive quality bibles with ornate bindings were printed for the wealthy.<sup>65</sup> As printing bibles became one of the largest parts of the publishing and printing industries, it became reliant upon sweated women workers. Contractors were encouraged to mechanize to avoid errors and reduce costs, and piece work became the norm. Bookbinder Thomas Joseph Dunning, who was a Christian, recognized that his trade was under threat and organized male master bookbinders into the London Consolidated Society for Bookbinders (LCSB). Dunning led its mobilization against BFBS's exploitation.<sup>66</sup> He recognized BFBS's astute profitable business acumen in its 'biblicizing' of poor and its macro production scale at the expense of the women binders' wages.<sup>67</sup> In January 1833, Dunning had issued a memorial stating that 200 women bookfolders and sewers employed by

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<sup>62</sup> London St Bride Foundation, *Specimens of 65 out of 160 versions of the holy scriptures printed and promoted by the British Foreign Bible Society, 1845*, Box EF.

<sup>63</sup> G. N. Cantor, *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119; Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5-7.

<sup>64</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 75-79.

<sup>65</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35.

<sup>66</sup> Emma Griffen, "The making of the Chartists: popular politics and working class autobiography in early Victorian Britain," *English Historical Review* 129, no. 538 (2014): 589.

<sup>67</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35; James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 31-34.

BFBS's five contractors could not earn an 'honest subsistence'. Their rates of pay being about half of the men's rates forced them 'to the seducers of female virtue'.<sup>68</sup>

BFBS ignored the memorial and stated that they could not interfere in the employment conditions set by their contractors. LCSB supported the 200 women's strike from January to August 1833.<sup>69</sup> The strike not only failed to improve conditions, but the BFBS even lowered its bibles' prices as the contractors replaced them with cheaper binders from Edinburgh. As the women bible binders continued to dispute their exploitation during the 1840s, Dunning continuously targeted religious and mainstream society with pamphlets and through the press with details of female bookbinders' exploitation. In January 1842, he sent another memorial to the BFBS complaining of the price reduction of the Pearl Bible bound in 'roan leather with gilt edges'.<sup>70</sup> Again, the memorial highlighted that the workers' under-priced work for the under-priced, luxuriously bound bibles, was forcing the bookbinders into prostitution. The memorial was published in newspapers, including the evangelical *The Patriot*. The publicity caused some subscribers to cancel. BFBS's committee demanded that their contractors draft responses to the accusations. The contractors eventually promised to pay their binders from 7s 6d to 15s for a working week of 10-hour days.<sup>71</sup>

However, as BFBS expanded its bible trade, they asked contractors to tender for larger, long-term legally binding contracts. This allowed BFBS to reduce its contractors, limiting both the contractors' capacity to work for others and the bookbinders' choice of employer. It made both parties vulnerable to BFBS's increasingly exploitative contracts. As profit margins tightened, contractors were

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<sup>68</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 31-34.

<sup>69</sup> Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 135.

<sup>71</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 5; James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 33; Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 135.

forced to cut wages and to ask their suppliers, who were also in a position of dependency, to lower their prices.<sup>72</sup> Yet, in 1845, 16 contractors tendered for a BFBS contract. Miss Lorena Watkins won with the lowest tender.<sup>73</sup> When BFBS reduced its prices, Watkins was forced to renege on her promise to her workers, many of whom were homeworkers on piece rates, that she would not lower their wages.<sup>74</sup> BFBS had changed the character and organization of London's bookbinding trade to one of dishonourable sweating.

In 1847, 'Plain John' highlighted the infamous BFBS when he wrote to the industrious classes of the 'peddling politicians and sham philanthropists...who propose to establish a political and social millennium by abolishing a few taxes and diffusing the knowledge of a few scriptures'. Plain notes how 'the men's Bookbinding Union have nobly thrown the shield of her protection over the women on strike'. He recognized that the plight of the small number of women bookbinders was the same plight of the thousands working in the international slop trades producing the raw materials to make finished goods. Plain highlighted that the workers' small wages further supplemented the trade's profits through fines and the cost of candles.<sup>75</sup> The contractor had to ensure that each bible was stamped with their mark so both the contractor and worker responsible for faulty work could be identified and a penalty issued. Later, contractors had to identify themselves using bookplates, as seen in Figure 31 below.

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<sup>72</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129-132.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas J. Dunning, *Bookbinders' Trade Circular*, October 7 1867.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas J. Dunning, London Journeymen Bookbinders, *Appeal of the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster to the Committee, members, donors and subscribers of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, on the subject of cheap Bibles* (London: S. Taylor, 1849); James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 196-197.

<sup>75</sup> John Plain, "Letters to the industrious classes: letter III: to the needlewomen of the United Kingdom," *Reynolds miscellany of romance, general literature, science and art* (London, England), February 20 1847.



**Figure 31: Bookplates.** Images included with permission from St Brides Foundation

In 1848, Watkins became BFBS's main contractor when she won another three-year contract. She also applied for an allowance to install new machinery. To comply with the contract and repay the mechanization allowance, she reduced piecework rates to between 5s 6d and 6s for a 60- to 65-hour week, from which she would take deductions and fines.<sup>76</sup> Learners were dismissed as a matter of course when they became entitled to the higher wage of 7s. A woman collator who left out a folded sheet and a sewer who failed to point out such a mistake would be deducted 1s. Women were forced to pay for water.<sup>77</sup> Watkins' employees lived in the poorest areas of London.<sup>78</sup> When 26-year-old Mary Zugg wrote to the BFB listing these

<sup>76</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 138.

<sup>77</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 33.

<sup>78</sup> "Appendix to first bound volume of The Bookbinders' trade circular," *The Bookbinders' Trade Circular*, 1850.

grievous conditions, they did not respond.<sup>79</sup> Zugg must have approached Dunning, because, once again, he, on behalf of the women workers, agitated against BFBS at meetings held at the London Mechanics Institute, Southampton Buildings, Holborn.<sup>80</sup> On around 17 July 1849, Dunning made public the evidence of women bookbinders' wages over a three-week period and clarified that women averaged 5s 11d a week. Watkins found herself at the centre of a scandal.<sup>81</sup> Dunning again called on the religious to recognize the exploitation in their name and published and distributed an appeal which referred to Hood's 'Song of the Shirt':

...females often have not the power to plead their own cause in such matters, and being helpless in many respects, where their wages are concerned, they are trodden down until a state of things such as described in the 'Song of the Shirt' appals the mind with the enormity of their injuries, their suffering and their mal condition.<sup>82</sup>

On 18 August 1849, the day after the publication of Dunning's appeal, Zugg cited that Watkins had breached pledges when tendering for the contract and persuaded her 300 colleagues to strike.<sup>83</sup> They demanded that Watkins pay the

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<sup>79</sup> London Journeymen Bookbinders, *Appeal of the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster to the Committee, members, donors and subscribers of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, on the subject of cheap Bibles*. (London: S. Taylor, 1849)

<sup>80</sup> "Cheap bibles," *London Evening Standard* (London, England), September 21 1849.

<sup>81</sup> "Wage tables in appendix published in 1849," in James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 196-202.

<sup>82</sup> London Journeymen Bookbinders, *Appeal of the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster to the Committee, Members, Donors and Subscribers of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, on the subject of cheap Bibles* (London: S. Taylor, 1849); James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 33.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas. J. Dunning, Secretary of the Bookbinders' Society, "Some account of the London Consolidated Society of Bookbinders; prepared for the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science," in *Trades' Societies and strikes: report of the Committee on Trade Societies; appointed by the National Association for the Promotion of the Social Science. Presented at the fourth annual meeting of the Association at Glasgow*, ed. Committee on Trade Societies (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860) 101-102; Melissa Score, "Social Progress?: Gender and Technology in British Printing Trade Union Journals 1840-1865," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47, no. 2 (2014): 274-295 (285-286).

same wages as those paid by SPCK's contractors of between 7s and 8s 4d per week; still a very low wage for skilled work.<sup>84</sup> Watkin's forewoman duped more than 100 workers into signing a document stating they had had nothing to do with Dunning's appeal, when they were really signing to confirm that their working conditions were satisfactory. Upon learning the truth, the binders asked for the document to be returned or destroyed. When it was not, some of the 100 binders then signed the appeal.<sup>85</sup> Both Dunning and Edwards called on allied unions and the publishing trade to support the women's strike fund. The unions raised £650.<sup>86</sup>

Zugg must have provided Edward Edwards, secretary to the London Society of Compositors, with information for his article, which stated, 'The females are not allowed access to water, though there are as many as 300 employed, except between four and half past and then only hot water for which they have to pay one penny per week to their employer'.<sup>87</sup> Watkins responded that the supply of water and the charge of one penny was voluntary.<sup>88</sup> Newspaper editors made the bible binders' plight a national outrage.<sup>89</sup> Joseph Mackey reported the scandalous prices for a 'ruby bible at 1s 6d, a pearl bible for 10d and a diamond testament for 4d – all

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<sup>84</sup> London Journeymen Bookbinders, *An Address to the Donors, Subscribers, and Friends of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, by the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster, ... in reply to a Statement of the Contractress of the above Society contradictory of certain portions of their "Appeal" on the subject of "cheap Bibles."* (London: S. Taylor, 1849) 8.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas J. Dunning, "Some account of the London Consolidated Society of Bookbinders; prepared for the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science" 101-102.

<sup>86</sup> Melissa Score, "The development and impact of campaigning journalism in Britain, 1840-1875 : the old new journalism?" PhD, Birkbeck (University of London), 2015 accessed Feb 2019

<http://bbktheses.da.ulcc.ac.uk/128/>

<sup>87</sup> University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, "Edward Edwards, To the members of the printing profession," *Trade Protection Circular*, October 1849; *Edward Edwards, To the delegates of the London Society of Compositors, Minute book, 1849*. London Society of Compositors (National Typographical Association), 1846-1849, MSS.28/CO/1/1/10.

<sup>88</sup> London Journeymen Bookbinders, *Appeal of the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster to the Committee, members, donors and subscribers of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, on the subject of cheap bibles*. (London: S. Taylor, 1849)

<sup>89</sup> "The Bible Society and bookbinders," *Hereford Times*, Saturday January 5 1850; "British Foreign Bible Society and Journeymen Bookbinders," *Leicester Chronicle*, January 21 1843.

bound in embossed covers and edges gilded'. Recognizing that Watkins' profit was so little, Mackey concluded that she must believe 'godliness is a great gain'.<sup>90</sup>

The BFBS's Manchester Auxiliary Society's Rev. Frost stated that BFBS 'have really nothing to do with the wages of the workpeople' and that it 'ought not to interfere with the labour market'.<sup>91</sup> The Religious Tract Society (RTS) retorted that the union leaders were cynical manipulators of puppet agitators and simple-minded workers.<sup>92</sup> Sixty binders signed Dunning's counter document, but it received a 'frosty' reply. Against Dunning's advice, the bookbinders continued to strike.<sup>93</sup> Dunning's article 'Cheap Bibles' printed on 21 September, stated that a '10d pearl bible could only be sold at that price through sweating', highlighting again that it did not allow Miss Watkins any profit.<sup>94</sup> Edwards found that SPCK and BFBS's wages were higher than Gardners' of Oxford Bible, and the Queens printer, Spottiswoode's wages, which were as little as 3s 11½d for folding 100 pearl bibles.<sup>95</sup> Trade unionist, Mr Frances Bennoch, noted that hypocritical 'holy scriptures become a curse, rather than a blessing'.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Mr Joseph Mackey, "Letters to the working classes LXVI," *Reynold's Miscellany of romance, general literature, science and art* (London, England), November 8 1849.

<sup>91</sup> London Journeymen Bookbinders, *An Address to the Donors, Subscribers, and Friends of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, by the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster, ... in reply to a Statement of the Contractress of the above Society contradictory of certain portions of their "Appeal on the subject of 'cheap bibles'."* (London: Journeymen Bookbinders [London], 1849).

<sup>92</sup> Ellic Howe and John Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951*, (London: Sylvan Press, 1952). 180.

<sup>93</sup> Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 142.

<sup>94</sup> "Cheap bibles," *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, October 25 1849; "Cheap bibles," *London Evening Standard* (London, England), September 21 1849; London Journeymen Bookbinders, *Appeal of the Journeymen Bookbinders of London and Westminster to the Committee, Members, Donors and Subscribers of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the religious public in general, on the subject of cheap Bibles*; Leslie Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 139-142.

<sup>95</sup> Warwick University, *Modern Records Compositors Union Minute book October 16 1849, 1846-1849*. MSS 28/10/1/1/10/2.

<sup>96</sup> "Production of cheap bibles," *The York Herald and General Advertiser* (York, England), Saturday November 10 1849.

The RTS, BFBS and Watkins stood firm. Miss Watkins' brother, Mr L. M. Watkins, publicly announced in *The Times* that Watkins' women earned between 9s and 14s. per week. BFBS insisted that the workers' complaints were an 'entire falsehood' as the women earned between 8s and 10s a week, while men earned 30s a week.<sup>97</sup> To end the dispute, Watkins replaced the striking women with cheaper Scottish workers. The women were forced back to work under the same conditions. Rev. Frost then denied the dispute and stated that, when he visited the workplace, he found the women workers cheerfully sitting, talking and folding, or stitching paper from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.<sup>98</sup> The dispute had cost the Bookbinders' Society £146 on printing and postage. Although Dunning believed strikes ineffective, he concluded that women's trade unionism was necessary, and that men and women should combine in unions. He was critical of the institutionalized male misogyny and believed the movement to be short sighted in not unionizing women. He set the example by expelling the 150 finishers who had opposed supporting the women's strike from the Bookbinders Society.<sup>99</sup>

The public outrage influenced some subscribers, such as philanthropist Rev. Runyard, to publicly denounced the BFBS's exploitation of its workers. *Punch's* cartoon entitled 'Our little bird' and *The Times'* coverage of 'Scripture slaves' and 'Bibles and brothels' developed a national debate on the victimization of workers.<sup>100</sup> Dunning and Edwards recognized that male workers' patriarchal advantage was being used for the benefit of employers because it undermined workers' combination and bargaining power.<sup>101</sup> Dunning recognized that dispute had highlighted the

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<sup>97</sup> "The Bible Society and bookbinders," *Devizes and Wiltshire*, December 27 1849.

<sup>98</sup> "The Bible Society and the bookbinders," *Hereford Times*, Saturday January 5 1850.

<sup>99</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 35.

<sup>100</sup> "Scripture slaves," *The Times*, 1849; "Our Little Bird," *Punch* (London, England), November 3 1849; "Bibles and brothels," *Weekly Times* (London, England), November 11 1849; "Cheap Bibles," *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, October 25 1849; "The Bible Society and the Book Binders," *Hereford Times*, January 5 1850.

<sup>101</sup> Howe and Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951*, 147.

exploitation of labour per se.<sup>102</sup> He concluded that education was the key to progress and founded the Bookbinders Society's library.<sup>103</sup> Dunning, like my subjects, Jeannette Wilkinson and Amie Hicks, railed against the status quo's perception of the working classes as immoral and not respectable.

Watkins continued as a contractor until her death. Her brother then took over the company. BFBS had to work hard to save its reputation, but it did not change its economic model. By the mid-1850s, it was again a veritable Victorian institution.<sup>104</sup> Bible printers Reed and Pardon's pamphlet espoused 'Let us be thankful that we may read the bible every day' and access 'God's own word' to guide us 'in the way to heaven', so 'those in distant lands' could follow the bible.<sup>105</sup> Contractors continued to place advertisements offering 'respectable' young women an apprenticeship in bible binding.<sup>106</sup> In 1851, the Earl of Shaftesbury became BFBS's President. Although Dunning and Edwards spoke for the women bible binders, they did not direct them. The bible binders demonstrated their volition to manifest their political agency to create change. They enacted their materialist agency in speaking directly to Watkins, BFBS, and Dunning and Edwards. The women manifested their corporeal agency in withdrawing their labour. The bookbinders, in their quiet way, had challenged the very essence of the state. However, as the state sweated the women bible binders, civil society questioned itself and industrial womanhood, with middle-class Chartist, Anne Knight, calling for universal suffrage.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Angela V. John, ed., *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 75; Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 146.

<sup>103</sup> Howe and Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951*, 174-187.

<sup>104</sup> Howsam, *Cheap bibles: nineteenth-century publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 140, 146.

<sup>105</sup> London St Bride Foundation, *The bible printers* (London: Reed & Pardon, 1850), Box 281.

<sup>106</sup> "Folders and Sewers wanted," *Morning Advertiser*, January 2 1854.

<sup>107</sup> Ruth Frow and Edmund Frow, eds., *Political women 1800-1850* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 201-2.

## **Middle-class feminist responses to women workers' exploitation and separate spheres ideology**

In 1857, less than two miles from Aldgate and Whitechapel Road in East London, upper- and middle-class radical unitarians, Bessie Raynor Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Emily Davies, Jessie Boucherett, Adelaide Anne Proctor and others founded the Ladies Institute, Langham Place. Central to their discussions was the 'woman question', which encompassed the role of motherhood, moral and social hygiene and welfare, women's employment and educational opportunities, and legal rights.<sup>108</sup> Boucherett, in recognizing women's economic need to work, initiated an equal rights women's movement. She advocated women workers resist the state and union controls over their working hours and conditions. Boucherett believed the state and unions' concerns for women's welfare were simply smokescreens to safeguard men's better-paid jobs.<sup>109</sup> In 1857, John Milne counteracted middle class arguments that women should not undertake waged work in the public sphere. Milne defended women's access to factory work because it kept women out of the workhouse and prisons. He also refuted that factory women workers were bad mothers who lived in disarray and drove their husbands to gin. Milne argued that poor unemployed women lived in greater squalor than women factory workers. He also noted that 'women have not organised themselves into a class', despite 'having common interests to have 'joint resistance for protection...by union'.<sup>110</sup>

In 1858, Parkes and Bodichon launched the *English Woman's Journal* from 14a Princes Street, in affluent Cavendish Square. The *Journal* was as critical of philanthropy as it was of working-class radicalism. Its article on 'emigration as a prevention of crime' clearly supported the dominant integral state's perspective. It

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<sup>108</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 77; Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840*, (London: Routledge, 2000). 11

<sup>109</sup> Jane Lewis and Celia Davis, "Protective legislation in Britain: 1887-1990: equality, difference and their implications for women," *Policy and Politics* 19, no. 1 (1991).

<sup>110</sup> J.D. Milne, "The Industrial and Social Position of women," in *Women in public: the women's movement 1850-1900*, chap. 10, ed. Patricia Hollis (London: Unwin, 1857), 77, 335.

was, however, feminist in its focus on the need for professional middle-class employment opportunities and recognized that many mothers had to work.<sup>111</sup> It renounced that 'women cannot do this; women must not do that, they are not strong enough for this' as it highlighted the lack of women's educational and employment opportunities.<sup>112</sup> When the *English Women's Journal* initiated a Register to place workers with employers it was inundated with applicants. Recognizing the depth of middle-class women's economic need, in 1859, Boucherett, Bodichon and Proctor founded the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW), with Lord the Earl of Shaftesbury as its President.

Given that 'many thousands of women of the educated classes have to earn their daily bread', SPEW prioritized providing training opportunities in arithmetic, clerical training, book-keeping and accountancy.<sup>113</sup> It later offered industrial apprenticeships.<sup>114</sup> Influential Harriet Martineau's words were placed upon the title pages of SPEW's annual reports and journals: 'The breadwinners, three millions out of six adult Englishwomen work for subsistence; and two out of the three in independence'.<sup>115</sup> However, what SPEW found was that middle-class women felt that working for wages undermined their respectability. When middle-class women workers 'begged' SPEW to be able to collect their wages using pseudonyms, SPEW recognized that femininity and respectability had to be balanced against strategies for achieving change.<sup>116</sup> SPEW sought ways to improve women's working opportunities and became affiliated to the National Association for the Promotion of

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<sup>111</sup> "Emigration as a prevention of crime," *English Woman's Journal*, 3, no. 2 (January 1 1859).

<sup>112</sup> *The English Woman's Journal*, 4, no. 9, 54-59 in "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women," 64.

<sup>113</sup> "Society for the Employment of Women," *London Daily News*, Thursday December 6 1866.

Anne, Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the society for promoting the employment of women." PhD, (University of Gloucestershire, 2003) 59.

<sup>114</sup> "Society for the Employment of Women," *London Daily News*, Thursday December 6 1866.

<sup>115</sup> Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women," 46.

<sup>116</sup> Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women," 36-38.

Social Science (NAPSS), which was also supported by the Earl of Shaftesbury, who later became its president. The respectable nature of bookbinding and the widespread coverage of the women bible binders' strike had drawn sympathy. Thomas Dunning was charged to write a report on the effectiveness of women's trade unionism.<sup>117</sup>

Although male trade unionism was spreading to many of the honourable trades, the male printers' antagonism towards women workers did not decrease. The unions argued that women did not have the physical strength and health to undertake such work, and women's exclusion was a 'necessary class struggle, pure and simple'. Such rhetoric gave male workers a patriarchal advantage.<sup>118</sup> SPEW and NAPSS took an interest in Emily Faithfull's Victoria Press, which provided women with unique training opportunities and proved that women were capable of such work.<sup>119</sup> Journalist Arthur Munby noted that three women had worked as governesses and that it employed men and women in well-ventilated conditions.<sup>120</sup> The Victoria Press took over the printing of the *English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864) and became the printer to Queen Victoria.<sup>121</sup> In 1860, Dunning published *Trades' Unions and Strikes: their philosophy and intention*, which John Stuart Mill noted in his *Principals of Political Economy* (1862) and Marx in his *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy – The Process of Capitalist Production* (1867).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ellic Howe and John Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951* (London: Sylvan Press, 1952), 93-104, 148 ; T. J. Dunning, Secretary of the Bookbinders' Society, "Some account of the London Consolidated Society of Bookbinders; prepared for the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science," in *Trades' Societies and strikes: report of the Committee on Trade Societies; appointed by the National Association for the Promotion of the Social Science. Presented at the fourth annual meeting of the Association at Glasgow*, ed. Committee on Trade Societies (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860).

<sup>118</sup> Score, "Social Progress?: Gender and Technology in British Printing Trade Union Journals 1840-1865," 280.

<sup>119</sup> "Employment of women," *Express* (London, England), Monday July 2 1860.

<sup>120</sup> Score, "Social Progress?: Gender and Technology in British Printing Trade Union Journals 1840-1865," 281.

<sup>121</sup> Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918." PhD (University of Sussex, 1995), 25.

<sup>122</sup> T. J. Dunning, "Trade Unions and Strikes: Their Philosophy and Intention." *Bookbinders Trade Circular* 3, March 26 1860; Kenneth Lapidés, *Marx's wage theory in historical perspective: its origins* (Westport, C.T.; London: Praeger, 1998), 83-85; Howe and Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951*, 147.

While Emily Davies took issue with the 'false division' of separate spheres ideology, John Stuart Mill acknowledged its indoctrination in his *Subjection of Women* (1869). Mill attempted to amend the Reform Bill 1867 to include women's right to vote.<sup>123</sup> Others questioned the 'indignity of dependence'. In 1843, Mrs Hugo Reid had compared such dependence to a weed clinging to a wall and, in 1862, W. R. Greg simply asked Why are women redundant?<sup>124</sup> In 1865, Bessie Rayner Parkes recognized middle-class women workers' expansion of the labour force and that class was determined by economic power. She noted that most of the population were the 'other' race. Parkes divided the population into 13 economic units: 1 represented the aristocracy; 3, the middle ranks; and the remaining 9, 'the masses'. The upper and middle classes' income ranged from over £5,000 a year down to under £100. The manual labour class' income ranged from £73 a year down to £10.10s a year.<sup>125</sup>

In 1874, in recognition of middle-class women's need to earn wages, Emily Faithful formed the Employment Bureau and newspaper, *Women and Work: a weekly industrial, educational and household register*, as a 'medium of communication between employers and employed'. It informed applicants of all possible employment and training opportunities; many of which were traditional working-class industrial trades. Employers were increasingly recognizing this potential middle-class labour force as they labelled their trade 'respectable'. BFBS placed advertisements for its training school for respectable 'working-class' girls and

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<sup>123</sup> Emily Davies, "Ideals" in *The Higher Education of Women* in Hollis, *Women in public: the women's movement 1850-1900*, 17-18; Emily Davies, "A false division" from *Ideals in Higher Education for Women*, 1866 and "The artificial nature of women" from J.S. Mill *The Subjection of Women*, 1869, chap. 1, in *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement*, ed Patricia Hollis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 17-19; Soldon, Norbert C., *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978) 6, 7.

<sup>124</sup> Mrs Hugo Reid, "A plea for women," in *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement*, ed Patricia Hollis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979) 293; W. R. Greg, "Why are women redundant?," *Edinburgh Review*, in *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement*, ed. Patricia Hollis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979) 8-9, 37-8.

<sup>125</sup> Joan Perkin, *Victorian women* (London: John Murray, 1993), 4.

listed offers of women bible binding jobs for 12s 6d per week for a 5- to 6-hour day with weekends free.<sup>126</sup> Local newspapers, such as the *Clerkenwell News*, also carried advertisements for local women's and girls' work, such as bookbinding.<sup>127</sup>

Male compositors were still nervous of combining with woman's trade unionists. The only male unionist concession was in 1866, when it agreed that women on equal wages to men should be admitted to the Typographical Association and the London Society of Compositors. Only one woman was able to avail herself of this resolution.<sup>128</sup> A. F. Musson concluded that 'men's insistence on equal wages was merely...a cover for their deep-rooted aversion to entry of women into the trade'. Despite male unions' animosity towards women workers, the women bible binders' strike must have continued to resonate, because, on 7 October 1867, Dunning wrote his final conclusion to the strike in the *Bookbinders' Trade Circular*, in which he stated that the mobilization of the bible women had stopped the diminishing of the trades' working conditions.<sup>129</sup> Working conditions, however, could not have fallen much lower.

The labour movement had created a political landscape through which trade unionists had intersected with the integral state's civil and political societies. The belief in the "good employer" and that trade unions formed as benefit societies could advantage employee and employer alike saw the state set up the 1867 Royal Commission on Trade Unions. In 1868, the London Trade Council (LTC) was founded and was followed by the formation of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 1869. Trade unions became legal under the Trade Union Act 1871. The bible binders' strike had initiated a class intersection in a burgeoning labour movement.

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<sup>126</sup> "British and Foreign Bible Society School," *Women and work: a weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, Saturday June 6 1874.

<sup>127</sup> "Bookfolders wanted...forewoman wanted experience in bible and prayer work" *Clerkenwell News*, August 2 1871.

<sup>128</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 40-42; MacDonald, *Women in the Printing Trades: a sociological study*, 25-26

<sup>129</sup> Howe and Child, *The Society of London Bookbinders, 1780-1951*, 162; Thomas J. Dunning, *Bookbinders' Trade Circular*, no. 7, October 1867.

Queen Victoria became SPEW's patron, and the Earl of Shaftesbury remained its president until his death in 1885.<sup>130</sup> Perhaps Shaftesbury's association with SPEW changed attitudes to the respectability of women's waged work. Despite Shaftesbury's pro-protective legislation stance, SPEW remained firmly anti such legislation. As the bible binders had been militating against their sweated working conditions, there were calls for garment makers to protect themselves.

### **Song for the tailoress, 1840-1874**

In 1842, *The Times* reported that Chartist Mary Ann Walker compared slop women's wages with the pensions received by the Queen and stated that it 'was shameful that while Englishwomen were receiving but 5d for making a pair of policemen's trousers, a German woman was receiving 100,000 a year, wrung from taxes...of hardworking men of England'. Fellow Chartist, Suzannah Inge, demanded that women 'have fair remuneration for their labour'.<sup>131</sup> The Chartist press was full of letters from male tailors and hatters describing the plight of their trade. Owenite Metropolitan Tailors' Protective Society's secretary, John Whittaker Parker, argued for women workers' inclusion in the Society because they had become 'our greatest competitor'. Whittaker Parker called upon women to establish their own Operative Tailors' Association and Joint Stock Clothing Companies and appealed to men to take out shares in such ventures.<sup>132</sup> Chartist journalist, Charles Harney, in *L'Ami de Peuple* clarified that women's low wages were due to masters, rather than women, undercutting themselves and male workers. However, he suggested that sweated

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<sup>130</sup> Bridger "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women," 48.

<sup>131</sup> *The Times* (London, England), October 25 1842, in Helen Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870" (PhD University of York, 1994), 142; *The Northern Star*, December 10 1842; "'The Chartist meeting - Miss Mary Ann Walker again'," *Evening Mail*, Wednesday October 26 1842; Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 1995), 235.

<sup>132</sup> "Metropolitan Tailors Protective Society," *Lloyds Weekly*, Sunday August 20 1843; "Metropolitan Tailors Protective Society," *Lloyds Weekly*, September 17 1843; Helen Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," *Victorian Studies* 40, no. 4 (1997): 607.

practices were foreign to British traditions and called for wages to be 'restored' to male breadwinner levels, and women 'restored' to their home.

Harney advocated closer links between the trade union and cooperative movements. Mayhew, like John Plain and Harney, saw the dressmakers' and slopwomen's poverty as part of the wider crisis in economic and labour organization. In East London, Chartist tailors organized large meetings on the politics of the slop trade.<sup>133</sup> Mayhew found that male tailors were recognizing that the more skilled female workers were also being undercut:

The masters have now learned that tailoring work, under the sweating system, can be done at almost any price; and hence those who are anxious to force their trade by under selling their more honourable neighbours...give the articles out to sweaters to be made by women and girls. By such means a regular tailor is being destroyed...women and children who before were unemployed in the tailoring trade, now form a larger proportion of the operative part of it. Needlewomen and seamstresses also suffer from the competition of inmates of the parish workhouses who produced 'common shirts' at three for a penny.<sup>134</sup>

The lack of female workers' reported voices did not reflect their wish to be quiet. In fact, many wished to speak. In 1849, when creating a "tale", Mayhew sought out 25 slop needlewomen who had taken up prostitution. Mayhew described them as 'ragged women and girls, some with their babies on their breasts', who came 'to tell their misery to the world'.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Helen Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870", Ph.D. (University of York, 1994) 172-174, 597, 608; Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class*, (Berkeley, Calif; London: University of California Press, 1995) 235; Helen Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," *Victorian Studies* 40.4 (1997) 589-623 597.

<sup>134</sup> Henry Mayhew, *Morning Chronicle*, November 6 1849; Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 52.

<sup>135</sup> Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 600.

Julia Swindells notes that one woman made use of the dramatic licence ascribed to women's lives when she spoke of her own 'sexual fall'. She saw hope in protective legislation so 'the oppressed will be oppressed no longer...the Parliament House will interpose to protect them. But I am sorry to say the good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good'. Mayhew found a further 62 women outside wishing to be part of the process of telling their story.<sup>136</sup> Impecunious middle-class needlewomen alarmed civil society. Their association with prostitution and poverty undermined the myth that these problems were working-class weaknesses. Although Lord Ashley (who later became Earl Shaftesbury) believed that a woman's proper place was in the private sphere, he recognized that unprotected surplus women required respectable feminine paid work. He clarified: 'the instant that work becomes minute, individual and personal...the instant that it requires tact, sentiment and delicacy' it becomes feminine work'.<sup>137</sup>

Needlework, because it suited 'a woman's natural skill and physique' was respectable work, but for its starvation wage.<sup>138</sup> In March 1843, Richard Dugard Grainger and Lady Ashley founded a committee to direct the Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners (AABDM) to act as an agency for freelance needlewomen of good character.<sup>139</sup> In its first year it helped 'upwards of 1,500 young females; of which 500 had been found positions and many had received medical and pecuniary relief'.<sup>140</sup> In 1850, Mayhew saw '7,500 names entered on its

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<sup>136</sup> Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 162-166.

<sup>137</sup> Angela John, *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918*, (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986) 15.

<sup>138</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 26.

<sup>139</sup> Jade Halbert, "Liberating the slaves of the needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863," *Retrospectives* 3 (2014): 44; Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, *Dignity and daily bread: new forms of economic organising among poor women in the Third World and the First*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994).73.

<sup>140</sup> "Association for the aid and benefit of dressmakers and milliners," *The Morning Post* (London, England), April 25 1845.

books'.<sup>141</sup> AABDM campaigned for protective legislation, which defined women and children as 'unfree agents' that required state protection to ensure they only worked a 10-hour day.<sup>142</sup> The press was full of articles, like Plain John's, who noted that needlewomen who made slopsellers' cheap ready-made clothes only earned between 6d and 12d.<sup>143</sup> Writers, such as Eliza Meteyard and Harriet Martineau, galvanized the burgeoning middle-class women's labour movement's support for the female milliner and dressmaker through *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849-1853). Meteyard contended that needlewomen who were a 'useful class' of 'British Labour' were treated like slaves.<sup>144</sup> Calls for industrial schools for working-class 'young women' grew louder.<sup>145</sup>

In 1847, Ashley and others founded the Distressed Needlewoman's Society (DNS), which also lobbied for protective legislation limiting women's working hours.<sup>146</sup> Christian Socialist, John Ludlow, who was impressed by how French cooperatives protected slop workers, stated that 'autocratic methods were necessary as poor women were incapable of self-government'. Ludlow joined evangelicals Charles Kingsley and Lord Ashley, along with Owenite Lloyd Jones and Chartists Gerald Massey and Walter Cooper in an 'uneasy' alliance to found the cooperative North London Needlewoman's Association at 31 Red Lion Square in the City. They also formed a Ladies Guild for the relief of slop women.<sup>147</sup> In 1849, AABDM founded

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<sup>141</sup> Halbert, "Liberating the slaves of the needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863," 49.

<sup>142</sup> "Association for the aid and benefit of dressmakers and milliners," *The Morning Post* (London, England), April 25 1845.

<sup>143</sup> Plain John, "Letters to the industrious classes III," *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art* 1, no. 16 (February 20, 1847): 250.

<sup>144</sup> Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 612.

<sup>145</sup> *Eliza Cook's Journal*, Saturday June 6 1849, 81.

<sup>146</sup> Halbert, "Liberating the slaves of the needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863," 44; Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 604.

<sup>147</sup> Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, *Dignity and daily bread: new forms of economic organising among poor women in the Third World and the First* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 162; Rogers, "Poetesses

the Milliners' and Dressmakers' Provident and Benevolent Institution and, in 1861, the Milliners' and Dressmakers' Association.<sup>148</sup> The problem of unemployed needlewomen seemed insurmountable. Caroline Chisholm's Family Colonization Loan Society seemed to provide a solution in its Society for Promoting Female Emigration.<sup>149</sup>

In 1849, government minister Sir Sidney Herbert joined Lord Ashley at a meeting attended by '1,000 to 1,200' working women in the 'British schoolroom' at the Exeter Building Ragged School, Shadwell in East London. Some were clad in 'habiliments of respectable poverty', but the majority were in 'rags'.<sup>150</sup> *The Examiner* reported that the '1,800' attended 'looked as if they had been disinterred'. Lord Ashley stated that women outnumbered men by 500,000 and this number had to be reduced. Emigration could provide the solution. 'The workers agreed'. Ashley, as president of Ragged Schools, stated that a local Ragged School would become the Colonial School of Training. Herbert stated that a passage to Australia of £15 is 'a small price to pay' and a committee would select 'women of good character' who would accompany orphan children.<sup>151</sup> Philanthropists then 'interrogated the poor women' as to 'their employment and rate of remuneration'. They 'elicited the most painful facts as to the state of misery and destitution' they were reduced to 'by the system of slop-sellers and cheap clothes'.<sup>152</sup> The voices of the 'distressed' were not

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and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 175-176; Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 609; Harold Goldman, *Emma Paterson: she led woman into a man's world* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 16.

<sup>148</sup> Halbert, "Liberating the slaves of the needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863," 44.

<sup>149</sup> "Fund for promoting female emigration," *London Daily News*, Tuesday January 1 1850, 4; Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 717; Jo Chimes, "'Wanted: 1000 spirited young milliners': the fund for promoting female emigration," in *Famine and fashion: needlewomen in the nineteenth century*, ed. Beth Harris (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 227.

<sup>150</sup> "Female labour and emigration," *The Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties* (Colchester, England), December 7 1849.

<sup>151</sup> "Distressed needlewomen of the metropolis," *Examiner* (London, England), December 8 1849.

<sup>152</sup> "Distressed needlewomen of the metropolis," *Examiner* (London, England), December 8 1849.

reported, but many surplus women evidently took up the offer to emigrate, as indicated in Figure 32 below.



**Figure 32: A wood engraving with the text "The Female Emigrants Home at Hatton Garden, the chief room", printed in *Illustrated London News*, March 13 1953**

(Source: National Library of Australia)

Chartist, George W. M. Reynolds argued against the ‘pseudo-philanthropic’ transportation scheme. John Plain stated that if needlewomen are driven abroad the next will be [male] tailors and shoemakers.<sup>153</sup> Herbert soon realized that needlewomen were not required in the colonies, and so, in 1860, Herbert and Lord Shaftesbury (formerly Lord Ashley) founded the self-supporting clothes factory cooperative, the Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen, in Lamb’s Conduit Street, on the edge of East London. It undertook government contracts for unreduced wages, which were much higher than those paid in sweatshops.<sup>154</sup> Harriet Martineau, who took an interest in such initiatives, noted that, by 1861, the Institution had placed 500 women ‘in light airy rooms’. However, despite advertising for workers in local papers, its needlewomen were not slop workers, but wives of

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<sup>153</sup> Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 609.

<sup>154</sup> "Needlework – plain work, shirtmaking at the Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen," *Holborn Journal*, Friday July 6 1860; Edith Simcox, "Eight years of co-operating shirtmaking," *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review* 15, no. 88 (1884).

shop keepers, ex-governesses and gentlewomen.<sup>155</sup> By 1863, the institution had employed 100 needlewomen in Whitechapel.<sup>156</sup> Its superintendent, Miss Barlee, who had espoused the need to protect the 'Friendless and Helpless', handed out work.<sup>157</sup> Such superintendents had the power of dismissal. They were overseen by ladies' committees and inspected by lady visitors.<sup>158</sup>

The plight of needlewomen was taken up by *The Times*, the *English Woman's Journal* and *All the Year Round*. In 1863, *The Times* published Jane La Plastrier's experience of slavery in a 'first-class' house in the series 'A season with the Dressmakers, or The experience of a First Hand', which reveals the hardship endured by 'a long-standing skilled' employee and an 'unsuccessful, but enlightened' employer.<sup>159</sup> Le Plastrier advocated that dressmakers and milliners must act for themselves and use the 'naïve' charities as a moderator of relations between workers and proprietors:

Union is strength; and as these fashionable houses cannot carry on their business without properly qualified first hands, I would say then, let these unite, and each render monthly [to the Association] an exact return of the hours they, and those under them, have been required to work and such other little details of their treatment as may be necessary.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Wanda F. Neff, *Victorian Working Women: an historical and literary study of Women in British industries and professions 1832-1850* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1966), 142.

<sup>156</sup> Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen, *Report May 1st, 1863-64* (London: Victoria Press, 1864).

<sup>157</sup> Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 183-184.

<sup>158</sup> Sheila Blackburn, "'Princesses and sweated-wage slaves go well together': images of British sweated workers, 1843-1914," *International labour and working class history* 61 (Spring 2002): 30,.<sup>158</sup> Neff, *Victorian Working Women: an historical and literary study of Women in British industries and professions 1832-1850*, 142

<sup>159</sup> Rogers, "'The good are not always powerful, nor the powerful always good': The politics of women's needlework in mid-Victorian London," 515; Rogers, "Poetesses and politicians: gender, knowledge and power in radical culture, 1830-1870," 187-189.

<sup>160</sup> *English Woman's Journal*, December 12 1863, 272.

Dr William Ord, in his 1863 report, *The Sanitary Circumstances of Dressmakers and other Needlewomen in London*, also suggested some form of unionization as a solution.<sup>161</sup>

In 1865, the London Tailors Protection Association formed to arbitrate better working conditions. However, in 1866, the West End masters were still refusing to agree to pay their outworkers a weekly pay rise of 1d. In the light of this failure, as Eastern European migrants formed unions with co-religionists, the militant Amalgamated Society of Tailors (AST) organized unions in the West End and the City.<sup>162</sup> In 1867, the London Tailors Protection Association in its inclusivity formed a tailoresses' branch as it organized a tailors' strike. Across London, tailors responded to its call to a 'monster meeting' on Easter Monday. Some '7,000 men' and up to '200 women outworkers' converged at the Alhambra theatre.<sup>163</sup> The Chair stated, 'This meeting of male and female outworkers pledges itself not to take work from any of the shops on strike'. A Jewish Mr Rosenberg assured the meeting that he had visited 'the sweaters in the East' and found few of them had accepted work from these shops. To ensure that the attendees did not take work from strikers their names and addresses were recorded.

A deputation went to 'all industrial centres' to negotiate with the employers, but it failed to reach agreement. Consequently, a larger strike was called. A total of 2,000 outworker tailors at 88 West End firms struck at a cost of 2,000 guineas per week. The president of the City branch of the London Protective Association called on City operative tailors to also support the 'men' in Albion Hall, London Wall.<sup>164</sup> Solidarity was such that 10,000 London journeymen supported the strike fund. The

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<sup>161</sup> Jade Halbert, "Liberating the slaves of the needle: The Association for the Aid and Benefit of Dressmakers and Milliners 1843-1863," *Retrospectives* 3 (2014): 56.

<sup>162</sup> Kersten, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995). 17-18.

<sup>163</sup> "The Tailors' Strike," *The London review of politics, society, literature, art and science* (London, England), May 11 1867; "The Tailors Strike," *The Examiner* (London, England), June 1 1867.

<sup>164</sup> "The Tailors' Strike," *The London review of politics, society, literature, art and science* (London, England), May 11 1867; "The Tailors Strike," *The Examiner* (London, England), June 1 1867.

strike was reported to workers in Sydney, Australia.<sup>165</sup> In 1872, the Jewish Socialist Union and Polish intellectual refugee Loui Smith founded the Lithuanian Tailors Union in Whitechapel. Within weeks it had 72 members. However, it dissolved within a few months due to their naivety and employer duplicity.<sup>166</sup>

In 1872, Sidney Herbert publicly recognized women workers' exclusion from male trade unions and male bias in protective legislation and advised that 'women should protect themselves' through women's trade unionism that taught 'discipline and obedience'. One journalist scathingly noted that Herbert also stated that there should be less marriage and greater sanitation to improve life standards. The journalist opined that a woman is a 'docile member of a trade union' uninterested in the labour question and will eventually marry.<sup>167</sup> Women were not docile. To protect their employment, 2,500 women and girl bookbinders had petitioned the Queen to stop the withdrawal of the 1870 Lectionary Bill, which allowed the printing of a diverse range of prayer books.<sup>168</sup> As the depiction in Figure 34 below indicates, attitudes to women workers' respectability were changing. The representation of the match women is very different from the 'disinterred' that Sir Herbert met during the 1840s.

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<sup>165</sup> "The Tailors strike," *The London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art and Science* (London, England), May 11 1867; "The Tailors Strike," *The Times* (London, England), April 1867; "The strike of the London tailors," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), Friday June 14 1867.

<sup>166</sup> Christine Collette, *For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 128.

<sup>167</sup> "Trades Unions for women," *The Dundee Courier & Argus* (Dundee, Scotland), Wednesday 17 1872.

<sup>168</sup> "A petition has been presented to the Queen...," *West Britain & Cornwall Advertiser*, October 20 1870.



**Figure 34: Female match makers, East End, London.** Engraved by J. T. Vintage for *The Graphic*, May 20 1871

(Source: Mary Evans Picture Library)

In 1868, Christian Socialists opened the Working Women's College in Queen's Gate for girls and women. More than 200 young women registered; some of whom had to walk from East London. It provided a hierarchy of education from teaching basic reading and writing to preparing workers for higher academic qualifications. In 1871, it amalgamated with the Working Men's College.<sup>169</sup> Despite the working-class political labour movement's encouragement of education, the Education Act 1870 was seen by many workers as the privileged class's interference in their lives.<sup>170</sup> Many in the women's labour movement saw women make gains through the Married Property Act 1870 and were encouraged to believe that industrial protective legislation would protect women workers. Middle-class SPEW

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<sup>169</sup> "Working Women's College," *The Daily News* (London, England), Friday October 29 1871; Wanda Fraiken Neff, *Victorian Working Women: a historical and literary study of Women in British Industries and Professions 1832-1850* ([S.l.]: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929), 143; Philippa Levine, *Victorian feminism, 1850-1900*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).40.

<sup>170</sup> James Young, *Socialism and the English working class*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989),28.

member and Liberal MP Fawcett argued against 'men's legislation', stating that 'there was something worse than work and that was want'.<sup>171</sup> (See Appendix 2 for a selective timeline of legislation). In 1874, the MP, Professor Fawcett, called for a Girls Public Day School Company (Limited) to establish a school in Hackney.<sup>172</sup> Working-class women were also becoming involved in the National Society for Women's Suffrage founded by Lydia Becker in 1871.

## Conclusion

Between 1840 and 1874, as women workers' industrial experience became increasingly political, they learned from the agency of others. The Earl of Shaftesbury represented the catalyst for women workers' industrial resistance to patriarchal capitalism. As he installed class legislation to contain social unrest and to desaturate the labour market of women workers, he created profits from his social initiatives to house the homeless and provide needlewomen with waged work. As president of both SPEW and BFBS, Shaftesbury ignored BFBS's exploitative practices and SPEW advertised its bible binding jobs. As isolated needlewomen took up SPEW's and the cooperatives' employment opportunities, they may have heard Chartists Neesom, Walker and Inge's words, and of Zugg's and Le Plastrier's solidarity through unions as they collected and delivered their work. The bible binders' political agency derived from their own volition to enact their materialist agency to arbitrate with their employer and BFBS, and to seek Dunning and Edwards' representation. They enacted their corporeal resistance to their industrial exploitation as they withdrew their labour. Their strike became a newspaper campaign influencing civil society, the broad labour movement and inspiring women workers in their volition for agency. Dunning became the working classes' hegemonic bridge to the integral state as he persuaded the civil and political societies that trade unionism was a useful mechanism to overcome workers' poverty.

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<sup>171</sup> Barbara Leigh Hutchins and Amy Harrison, *A history of factory legislation* ([S.I.]: [s.n.], 1903), 184.

<sup>172</sup> "Education of women," *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 21, October 24 1874, 3.

As women workers became inextricably integrated into the organization of the labour force, their experience became the catalyst of the women's labour movement and the formation of feminist ideas of womanhood. Charities installed themselves in East London to help the poor, and became largely driven by women, for women and their children. As charity workers developed practical organizational and management skills, they became confident in the public sphere. Influenced by their intersection with working women, they debated the "woman question" and many advocated the protection of women workers through trade unions. Shaftesbury had placed himself at the apex of the complex power hierarchy within the broadening labour movement and set the agenda of the most privileged and avowed persons in society. As the most powerful limited women workers lives and voices, they were the catalyst for working-class women's agency from below.

## **Chapter 6: 1874-1886: Working-class women's trade unionism under Emma Paterson's leadership of the Women's Protective and Provident League (WPPL)**

### **Introduction**

By 1874, untrained middle-class women were increasingly seeking waged work, and their wealthy sisters recognized that they needed protecting. In the same year, the middle-class initiative, the Women's Protective and Provident League ("the League") was formed to encourage women workers' unionization. With specific reference to women's bookbinding, upholstery, garment making and tailoring trade unions, this chapter provides a history of working-class women's trade union mobilization. As women workers developed their trade unionism, they also developed their materialist, political and corporeal agency. As workers' militancy increased, the middle-class platforms of the settlement movement, the Socialist Fabian Society and the Marxist SDF developed political visions. As these platforms entwined in their support for women's trade unionism, the women's labour movement developed its feminist ideas on the protection of women workers.

### **Women's trade unionism, 1874-1886**

The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women's (SPEW) Register and Emily Faithful's Employment Bureau and her newspaper *Women and Work: a weekly industrial, educational and household register* helped the 'uneasy' middle-class women in their 'battle against life of overwhelming odds' to earn wages.<sup>1</sup> *Women and Work's* Positions Vacant column, whilst advertising for needlewomen, also advertised for clerical workers, confectioners and cigar makers. The *Englishwoman's Review* advertised positions to its middle-class readership, which included telegraph, retail and office clerks. The North London Tramway company sought out female detectives alongside a minority of professional posts, such as

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<sup>1</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, Saturday June 13 1874.

dentists and lithographers.<sup>2</sup> However, in East London, most women's jobs were too "menial" for their middle-class applicants. Faithful's article 'Nothing Menial' takes issue with the middle-class female mantra of 'I am ready to do anything; I do not care what I do, so long as it is not menial'. 'Menial', she states, 'simply means 'something that is done by many'. Faithful called for more menial work for women because it signified more employment opportunities. She warned that 'ladies who shrink from menial work...to seeking dignity...miss all chances' as she recognized that most women would have to resort to industrial work.<sup>3</sup> Faithful advertised Crosse and Blackwell's pickle and jam making factory vacancies at 2s to 3s per day depending on the class of worker.<sup>4</sup>

Faithful, like J. D. Milne, took issue with the representation of the 'slovenly nature of a factory worker'. She found factory workers presented well compared to other women workers and stated that 'factory work is lighter' than other types of work. Faithful believed 'modern science can enhance the working environment' and would offer women more employment opportunities.<sup>5</sup> She also suggested that when women and men worked alongside each other they did not compete. Faithful advocated that boys and girls should study and train together. Greater sex equality and solidarity would avoid situations, such as when male polishers forced an employer to lay off female polishers.<sup>6</sup> In 1876, the *Englishwoman's Review* declared:

...women whether seamstresses, factory hands, servants, authoresses, countesses...form one common class...so long as there is 'class' legislation...insurmountable difference between men and women, women must be spoken of as a separate class.

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<sup>2</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, July 14 1877, 317; *Englishwoman's Review*, June 15 1877, 271.

<sup>3</sup> "Nothing menial," *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, 8 July 25 1874, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* (London: Victoria Press, 1874-1876).

<sup>5</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, Saturday June 13 1874.

<sup>6</sup> "Jealousy of women's employment," *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 15, September 12 1874, 5.

The *Englishwoman's Review* advocated that this separate class would overturn class legislation that sees women as an 'inferior class' to men.<sup>7</sup> Even the upper-class women's newspaper, *The Queen*, encouraged its readers to buy work by ladies of limited means sold through eight ladies associations.<sup>8</sup> In 1874, Emma Paterson galvanized these feelings of mutual help through the formation of the Women's Protective and Provident League (the League).<sup>9</sup>

### **Working-class women's trade unionism, 1874-1886**

Emma Paterson had heard Mr Auberon Herbert's calls for women to protect themselves and their children through women's trade unions.<sup>10</sup> As an impecunious educated woman who had been raised in the spirit of equal rights, she recognized herself as a working woman with economic needs.<sup>11</sup> Paterson published a series of articles in *Labour News* exposing women's sweated working conditions. She stated that women were 'paid half, or less than half, for doing work as well', and as quickly as men. Skilled women's wages were anything from 11s to 17s a week, less than unskilled male wages of 18s.<sup>12</sup> Paterson knew of the bible binders' agency and women's participation in the 1867 tailors' strike. Having seen effective women's trade unions in New York, she believed that working women could help themselves

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<sup>7</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, March 1876.

<sup>8</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, February 15 1877, 82-83.

<sup>9</sup> Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 3 (2017): 593-4.

<sup>10</sup> "Trade unions for women," *The Dundee Courier and Argus* (Dundee, Scotland), Wednesday June 17 1872.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Goldman, *Emma Paterson: she led woman into a man's world* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 23-24; Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 3 (2017): 599.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Paterson, "The position of women engaged in handicrafts and other industrial pursuits," in *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences: Glasgow meeting 1874*, ed. Charles Wager Ryalls (London: Longman Green & Co, 1875), reprinted in *Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions*, January 21 1875, 3. Google Books, accessed April 16 2019; Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* (London: Virago, 1984), 10.

through trade unionism.<sup>13</sup> In light of the growing sympathy for women workers and support for trade unions, on 8 July 1874, she called a conference at Quebec Institute near Marble Arch in Central London. Although she asked for women 'engaged in trades' to attend, it was mostly attended by the wealthy privileged.<sup>14</sup>

As assistant to the clerk of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (WMCIU), Paterson had learned of worker arbitration and protection. She believed that workers' industrial power lay in their capacity to combine and form 'entente cordiales' with 'good' employers'.<sup>15</sup> Like many male trade unionists, Paterson believed strikes ineffective because they only created more poverty and achieved little permanent improvement in working conditions. A women's trade union organization would improve women's wages without undercutting men's and would give male workers the confidence to consolidate in combined unions.<sup>16</sup> Paterson's original proposal took the form of a National Union of Working Women (NUWW) initiated in Bristol in September 1874 to facilitate separate unions. The better paid members' contributions assisted the badly paid.<sup>17</sup> Its Secretary, Mr H. M. Hunt, presented the NUWW at the 1874 TUC Conference. It ran for 20 years, but only gained 100 members.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Emma Paterson, "The position of women engaged in handicrafts and other industrial pursuits," in *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences: Glasgow meeting 1874*, ed. Charles Wager Ryalls (London: Longman Green & Co, 1875), reprinted in *Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions*, January 21 1875, 3. Google Books, accessed April 16 2019; Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* (London: Virago, 1984), 10; Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 68.

<sup>14</sup> WPPL, *Annual report, 1875*; Harold Goldman, *Emma Paterson: she led woman into a man's world*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974). 36; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995, 62; Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 14; Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 11. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920

<sup>15</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 68-70; Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918" (PhD University of Sussex, 1995), 39.

<sup>17</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 9, 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> WPPL, *Annual report, 1874*, 14, Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 15.

As women workers feared victimization when associated with trade unions, Paterson modelled ideas of unions on women's self-help friendly societies, which protected workers during economic depressions, or when they were sick. Some had even endeavoured to consolidate their industrial power.<sup>19</sup> It was decided that a federation of societies would be more acceptable and effective, especially in London. The umbrella labour organization, the Women's Protective and Provident League (WPPL) was formed. The word "League" had a positive resonance with the Anti-Corn League and other victorious movements. Societies would be the female equivalents of male trade unions.<sup>20</sup> Paterson wanted to harness middle-class power, political will, financial resources, organizational skills and leisure time for the good of working-class women. She believed that an 'alliance of women' of different classes would go further than 'women of education and leisure' stepping in when their poorer sisters had 'fallen' into poverty.<sup>21</sup>

The League's executive was composed of advocates of women's rights, trade unionism and Christian Socialism. It encompassed a multitude of middle-class views; many of whom subscribed to class difference and separate spheres ideology.<sup>22</sup> Paterson did not quietly ignore the impact of separate spheres ideology. She stated, 'It is said that men are paid higher wages than women because they have families to support, but no-one ever proposes to pay single men lower wages than married men'. She also spoke out about the sexual harassment women endured in the

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Weinbren, "The Good Samaritan, friendly societies and the gift economy," *Social History* 31, no. 3 (2006); Andrea A. Rusnock and Vivien E. Dietz, "Defining women's sickness and work: female friendly societies in England, 1780-1830," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 174.

<sup>20</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 10; Felicity Hunt, "Opportunities lost and gained: mechanisation and women's work in the London bookbinding and printing trades," in *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918*, ed. Angela Johns (Oxford, 1986), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 62.

<sup>22</sup> "Women's Protective and Provident League [Council and Committee members]," *Englishwoman's Journal*, July 1874; Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement*, 14; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 11.

workplace.<sup>23</sup> Paterson's vision was one where working women would speak for themselves.<sup>24</sup> A list of the League's executive is detailed in Figure 33 below.

WOMEN'S PROTECTIVE AND  
PROVIDENT LEAGUE:  
*for the formation of Protective and Benefit  
Societies among Women earning their own  
livelihood.*  
ESTABLISHED JULY 8th, 1874.

COUNCIL.

Madame Belloc, Mrs. Jacob Bright, Rev. Stepford  
A. Brooke, M.A., Miss Jessie Boucherett, Miss P. P.  
Cobbe, Hon. Mrs. Maurice Drummond, Mr. Gale,  
Mr. Allerdale Grainger, Mr. Daniel Guile, Mr.  
Chas. Hancock, M.A., Mr. F. Harcastle, Rev.  
H. R. Haweis, Mrs. Hoggan, M.D., Prof. Hughes,  
Rev. J. Johnson, Sir Harcourt Johnstone, M.P.,  
Mr. J. W. Julian, Rev. Brooke Lambert, Mr. J. H.  
Levy, Mr. H. W. Lawrence, Mrs. Lucas, Rev. G. M.  
Murphy, Mrs. Croom Robertson, Rev. Wm. Rogers,  
M.A. Rev. Rodolph Suffield, Miss A. Swanwick,  
Mrs. P. A. Taylor, Miss Helen Taylor.

COMMITTEE.

Miss A. L. Browne, Miss Brown, Mrs. H. R.  
Fox Bourne, Miss E. C. Clayton, Mr. Henry  
Crompton, Miss H. P. Downing, Miss Dunbar, Miss  
Hamilton, Rev. Septimus Hansard, Rev. Stewart  
D. Headlam, Mrs. Featherly, Mr. King, Miss  
McCall, Mr. C. R. McClymont, Mr. Paterson, Mr.  
Hodgson Pratt, Mrs. Hodgson Pratt, Miss Reeves,  
Madame Ronniger, Mrs. Scull, Mr. J. R. Shearer,  
Mr. George Shipton, Miss Simcox, Rev. J. Sinclair,  
Mr. Adolphe Smith, Mr. S. S. Tayler, Mr. F. W.  
Verney, Miss C. Williams, Mr. A. J. Williams,  
Miss Wilkinson, Miss Whyte.

TREASURER. Mrs. Sims, 48, Hamilton Terrace  
N.W.,

HONORARY SECRETARY. Mrs. Paterson,  
2, Brunswick Row, Queen Square, W. C.,

**Figure 33: Women's Provident and Protective League's Council and Committee, published in the *Women's Union Journal* 1874**

<sup>23</sup> "The position of women engaged in handicrafts and other industrial pursuits," in *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences: Glasgow meeting 1874*, ed. Charles Wager Ryalls (London: Longman Green & Co, 1875), reprinted from *Englishwoman's Review*, January 1875: 1-12 (3).

<sup>24</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 15.

Faithful shared Paterson's idea of the 'good employer'. It coincided with her entrepreneurial view of cooperation between employer and the informed and trained employee. She also supported the idea in principle of women's trade unions. However, Faithful questioned 'ladies and gentlemen's' patronage of women's unions and the modelling of them on men's unions, which had so misrepresented women workers and restricted their access to work. She stated that women would have to 'band together at once in scores, if not hundreds and thousands' and given 'the lack of necessary educational and material resources'... 'they might as well embark on a new crusade to conquer the Holy Land'.<sup>25</sup> Historians, such as Sarah Boston and Gerry Holloway, concur with Faithful's view, suggesting that the League was defined by its middle- and upper-class executive, who preferred to protect the more skilled manual worker as opposed to the poorer unskilled worker.<sup>26</sup> As this thesis has shown, skilled and unskilled wages were almost indistinguishable and some work labelled unskilled was very skilled. Despite Faithful's cynicism, her newspaper, *Women and Work*, informed its readership of the League's development of trade unions. It also discussed the limiting impact of protective legislation and encouraged women to sign Helen Blackburn's suffrage petition.<sup>27</sup>

To galvanize the women's trade union movement, Paterson formed the Women's Printing Society Ltd, which printed the League's publication the *Women's Union Journal (WUJ)*. The Printing Society's women employees undertook every stage of its compositor work.<sup>28</sup> Its prohibitive cost of 1d per copy saw it targeted at the League's executive and supporters. Between 1876 to 1879, the *WUJ* endorsed domestic feminine ideals whilst encouraging women's education and autonomy, 'mutual self-help and competence for self-government' without acknowledging the

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<sup>25</sup> "The women's unionist agitation," *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 33, Saturday January 16 1875, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Gerry Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), 58-60; Sarah Boston, *Women workers and the trade union movement* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980), 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, Saturday June 20 1874; Central Committee of the National Society of Women's Suffrage, *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women*, Saturday November 28 1874, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978). 15.

issues of class or gender.<sup>29</sup> The *WUJ* and the League's reports fail to incorporate the unions' members voices. Was this an oversight, or was Paterson capitalizing upon the ethos of wealthy women patrons who believed women workers should not be heard? However, as Arabella Shore explained in a lecture to the League in 1879, 'Trades Unions are a kind of a beginning of political life'.<sup>30</sup> Radical conversations were developing. While some drew historical inspiration from William Lovett's equal inclusion of women in his Chartist vision, others, such as Emily Davies, feared that 'unwomanly' behaviour, such as physical or visual resistance, would be used as an excuse not to grant equal rights.<sup>31</sup>

In December 1874, Miss Edith Jemima Simcox (1844-1901) saw in the *Echo* a short report of a public meeting attended by working women who made speeches and advocated the formation of a women bookbinders' union. For Simcox this was 'epoch-making', because not only the bookbinders, but also women working in other trades were successively invited to unionize with the same objectives as workmen's trade unions. Simcox became Paterson's 'chief lieutenant' and helped set up societies nationally as well as in London.<sup>32</sup> In 1875, the League's committee drew up its constitution, which included the following objects:

1. To protect the trade interests of the members by endeavouring where necessary to prevent the undue depression of wages and to equalize the hours of work.
2. To provide a fund from which members may obtain an allowance weekly, in sickness or while out of employment.

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<sup>29</sup> Melissa Walker, "On the move: biography, self-help and feminism in the *Women's Union Journal*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 3 (2017): 585-618 (585-586).

<sup>30</sup> Pauline Polkey, "Reading history through autobiography: politically active women of late nineteenth century Britain and their personal narratives," *Women's History Review* 9.2 (February, 2000) 483-500, 485.

<sup>31</sup> "William Lovett," *Englishwoman's Review*, September 15 1877, 423-424; Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 58; Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 58.

<sup>32</sup> Constance M. Fulmer and Margaret E. Barfield, eds., *A monument to George Elliot: Edith J. Simcox's autobiography of a shirt maker* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 215.

3. To arrange for the registration of employment notices so that trouble in searching for work may be avoided, and to collect useful information.
4. To promote arbitration in cases of dispute between the employer and employed.<sup>33</sup>

All women over the age of 16 who had been employed for six months in the trade were eligible for membership, provided that two union members could testify to her competency as a work-woman. After the entrance fee of 1s or 2s, each member paid a contribution of 2d. or 3d. a week, according to the trade. After one year's membership, benefits included sickness and out-of-work cover. Industrial disputes were to be avoided and there was no financial provision for strike or lock-out cover.<sup>34</sup> Initially, the League provided the trade unions or societies with 'office accommodation at a moderate charge' via their central address at 36 Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn, W.C, which, in 1888, changed to Industrial Hall, Clark's Buildings Broad Street Bloomsbury, W.C. The League encouraged 'persons having leisure to act as provisional secretaries' until the women workers found a representative from their trade. These were noted as honourable secretaries because they did not work in the trade. Local clergy supported the movement with the provision of meeting spaces.<sup>35</sup>

### **Societies of Bookbinders and Upholsterers**

On 12 September 1874, the Society of Women Employed in Bookbinding formed the League's prototype female union.<sup>36</sup> More than 300 women attended the

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<sup>33</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 13; *The Women's Union Journal: the Organ of the Women's Protective and Provident League* 11 (1876).

<sup>34</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 13; *The Women's Union Journal* 1, no. 1 (1876).

<sup>35</sup> *The Times* (London, England), June 20 1877, in Teresa Olcott, "British feminists' intervention in working women's trades unions and legislation, 1873-1903." Graduate student theses, dissertations, and professional papers. 5219, accessed February 14 2019, <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/5219>.

<sup>36</sup> "Trades Unions for women," *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 15 (September 12 1875): 5; B. L. Hutchins and J. J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* ([S.l.]; Bell, 1915), 120.

three-hour meeting and nearly all became members. Richard Dugard Grainger, who had infantilized women under the Children's Commission, also attended. Given that he thought bookbinding an acceptable feminine trade, perhaps he also thought it acceptable that women organize to improve their working conditions. The working women agreed that they would pay 1s per month.<sup>37</sup> Faithful's newspaper took great interest in the formation of this first union.<sup>38</sup> At the quarterly meeting of the London Trade Council (LTC), bookbinder and secretary of the London Consolidated Society of Bookbinders (LCSB), Mr King, described the League as a movement for the formation of trades societies amongst female workers. Following in the footsteps of Thomas Dunning, King advocated that the LTC should 'pledge itself to support such a movement by all means in its power'. Bricklayer Mr Coulson seconded the resolution.<sup>39</sup> The *Bookbinders' Trade Circular* printed Paterson's letter of thanks for its full inaugural meeting and its encouragement of women bookbinders to join the Society.<sup>40</sup>

Paterson became the bookbinders' provisional Secretary, until working bookfolder, Miss Eleanor Whyte, took over in April 1875. That year, Whyte became the first woman delegate at the TUC. By October 1875, the Society had raised £80 from subscriptions and entrance fees. These funds enabled the initiation of sickness and unemployment benefits. Three quarters of the Society's members were single women and widows.<sup>41</sup> In August 1876, hundreds of women employed in folding, sewing and other branches of bookbinding attended one of the Society's meetings. Paterson read out Dunning's original letter in which he advocated 'the formation of

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<sup>37</sup> "Women's trade societies," *Women and Work: a weekly industrial, educational and household register for women* 16 (September 19 1874).

<sup>38</sup> *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 15 (Saturday September 12 1874): 16; (Saturday September 19 1874): 3.

<sup>39</sup> "Trades Union for Women." *Women and Work: A weekly industrial, educational, and household register for women* 15 (Saturday September 12 1874): 5.

<sup>40</sup> Score, "Social Progress?: Gender and Technology in British Printing Trade Union Journals 1840-1865," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47.2 (2014) 274-29 286.

<sup>41</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978). 15.

trades societies for women'.<sup>42</sup> More than 200 became paid-up members. Another large meeting was organized. A total of 300 invitations were distributed to employees of three large local bookbinding establishments. On Tuesday 20 January 1877, 250 women attended the St Bride's Parish Room, Bride Lane, Fleet Street.<sup>43</sup> Thereafter, the Society regularly invited large employers to preside at their annual meetings. By 1893, the Society's office was located at 2 Clerkenwell Road, E.C.<sup>44</sup>

## **Society of Upholsterers**

On 8 April 1875, the Society of Upholsterers was formed.<sup>45</sup> In December that year it held a large meeting in a schoolroom at Bishopsgate to explain trade unionism. A local employer pronounced women's trade unionism necessary because no one tradesman can pay a higher salary unless all competitors consent to similar terms.<sup>46</sup> At the Society's first annual meeting in May 1876, it reported that it had 119 members. The Chair, Herbert Auberon, stated that 'women were awakening to the sense of the enormous power of unions', but also warned those present 'not to put their trust in legislation, which would never be as satisfactory, or as effective as an agreement with the employers'. Miss Frances Cobbe noted that it seemed to her 'that the difficulties men had to contend with in their struggle for subsistence were but small compared to those of women'.<sup>47</sup> Miss Elizabeth Mears expressed determination to further the promotion of the society. Then, on behalf of the Society's members, she presented Mrs Paterson with an inscribed rosewood inkstand and stationery case. Paterson stated that she would continue as the Society's secretary but hoped that it would find another. Mrs Oakley became its secretary until, in October 1876, Jeannette Wilkinson took over on a salary of 30s per quarter.<sup>48</sup> On 17

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<sup>42</sup> James Ramsay MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), 36-7.

<sup>43</sup> *The Women's Union Journal*, 1881.

<sup>44</sup> "Directory of Trade Unions," *Women's Trade Union Review* (London, England), 1893.

<sup>45</sup> *The Women's Union Journal*, 1875.

<sup>46</sup> "Women's trade unions," *Englishwoman's Review* 33 (January 1876): 28-29.

<sup>47</sup> "Society of Upholsterers: first annual meeting," *Women's Union Journal* 1, no. 4 (Wednesday May 31 1876).

<sup>48</sup> "Society of Upholsterers: first annual meeting"; "Society of Upholsterers: the second half yearly meeting," *Women's Union Journal* 1, no. 10 (Thursday November 30 1876).

June 1876, the Societies of Women Employed in Bookbinding and Upholsterers organized an excursion to Epping Forest. They sold 250 tickets. The working women's banners made a spectacle. Such excursions became regular fundraising outings as women developed their materialist agency. Teas were provided alongside a lecture and singing.<sup>49</sup> By 1877, Paterson thought the Upholsterers Society 'gratifying'. Its membership had risen to 300 and it had elected its 'committee members and officers entirely by themselves'.<sup>50</sup>

Wilkinson's teacher and friend, Joseph Levy, regularly attended meetings. He put forward a resolution to support workwomen of Paris. It was seconded by Mrs Heatherley of the Operative Dressmakers' Society who said she would report back when she had knowledge of Italian and French workwomen's unionization. The musician, Tito Pagliardini, attended a meeting in 1884.<sup>51</sup> Wilkinson resigned as the Society's Secretary in October 1884 to take up the post of suffrage activist. However, she continued to advocate trade unionism as she encouraged workers to demand suffrage. At one union meeting, 'fifty ladies' directed Wilkinson to forward their resolution demanding the franchise to Mr F. A. Channing, MP.<sup>52</sup> When Elizabeth Mears replaced Wilkinson as Secretary, Wilkinson continued as the Society's hon. secretary.<sup>53</sup> By 1885, the upholstery trade was in a national depression. The Society's members' numbers were declining. Employers continued to permit the Society to visit their workrooms to encourage union membership. The Society survived for 19 years until 1894.<sup>54</sup>

## **Societies of garment makers and tailoresses**

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<sup>49</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, July 1877.

<sup>50</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 16 (May 1 1877): 26.

<sup>51</sup> "Society of Upholsterers: first annual meeting," *Women's Union Journal* 1, no. 4 (Wednesday May 31 1876); Society of Upholsterers: the second half yearly meeting," *Women's Union Journal* 1, no. 10 (Thursday November 30 1876).

<sup>52</sup> *The Northampton Mercury*, March Saturday 30 1886, 6.

<sup>53</sup> J. G. Wilkinson, "Upholstresses Trade Society," *Women's Union Journal* 105 (Wednesday October 1 1884): 92.

<sup>54</sup> "Upholstresses' Trade Society," *Women's Union Journal* 111 (Wednesday April 1 1885): 26.

From 1875, across London, tailoresses and garment makers enthusiastically attended union meetings, but their unions struggled to survive. In 1875, the Society of Women Employed in Binding, Sewing and Trimming Men's Hats and the Society of Hatmakers in East London were formed, but both quickly folded owing to the 'antagonism of employers'.<sup>55</sup> A group of dressmakers approached the League to form another union and 400 working women 'enthusiastically attended' a meeting at the Cooperative Institute, Castle Street.<sup>56</sup> On 1 July 1875, the Society of Shirt and Collar Makers in East London was formed.<sup>57</sup> A sympathetic employer took part in the preliminary proceedings and cordially welcomed the women's movement.<sup>58</sup> In 1877, it became the Shirt Collar and Underlinen Makers, with middle-class Miss Augusta Brown as its Hon. Secretary.<sup>59</sup> In 1882, it had its 6th Annual Soiree. It survived a further few years with working dressmaker Mrs Houlton as its Secretary.<sup>60</sup> In 1893, its office was at 2 Clerkenwell Road, E.C.<sup>61</sup> A Society of London Machinists formed in February 1876 and Rev. Wm Rogers lent them the Bishopsgate Schoolroom for their first quarterly meeting in May 1876. After its members and other sewing machine workers had listened to Miss Simcox and Mrs Paterson's addresses, they sang songs and listened to Misses Hamilton, Shury, Luck and a Mrs Macroll's pianoforte music and recitations.<sup>62</sup> The society gained 400 members, but then they dwindled down.<sup>63</sup>

In 1876, Miss Edith Simcox and Miss Mary Hamilton set up a Co-operative Shirt Makers' Association, Hamilton & Co, at 68 Dean Street, Soho, to support the East End's sweated needlewomen. Simcox and Hamilton had learned from Miss Barlee's experience as superintendent at the aforementioned cooperative, the

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<sup>55</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> "Directory of Trade Unions," *Women's Union Journal*, 1876-1877

<sup>58</sup> "Directory of Trade Unions," *Women's Union Journal*.

<sup>59</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 67 (August 1 1881): 83.

<sup>60</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 87 (April 1 1883): 25; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> "Directory of Trade Unions," *Women's Trade Union Review* 10 (July 1 1893): 18.

<sup>62</sup> "Society of London Machinists," *Women's Union Journal* 4 (Wednesday May 31 1876): 21.

<sup>63</sup> WPPL, *Annual report*, 1877.

Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen.<sup>64</sup> The initial meeting at St Martin's Schoolroom near Convent Garden was attended by 'plainly dressed, mostly middle-aged and somewhat hard-featured', 'ready-witted' and 'on the whole eminently respectable looking women'. To them 'poverty, hunger and dirt were normal conditions of their existence'. Not being slopworkers, they 'responded heartily' to the suggestion that organization must begin in the best paid part of the trade, which was ever more under threat from competitors of cheap slopwork. They opined that the shirts had to be made at a price which would afford a subsistence for both the maker and the dealer, until they could do away with the dealer. Simcox noted that the cooperative had to acquire the skills and business knowledge that male tailors acquired through their training. They had to find premises, undertake market research, find orders and negotiate prices, dilute the shirt making process and match workers to the processes. Initially, the cooperative employed 9 women from East London. By April 1877, it employed 40 women.<sup>65</sup> It closed in 1884.

On a Tuesday evening, 1 May 1877, Simcox, Paterson, Whyte and Mears addressed the male London District Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors (AST) at the Tailors institute, Denman Street, Golden Square, on the question of forming a trade union of tailoresses. The meeting was also attended by Rev. Barnett of St Jude's, and the secretary of the Tailors Society. The chair, Mr MacDonald of the AST, stated, 'If a woman did the same amount of work as a man and did it equally well, she should receive as much as a man would receive for the same work'. Paterson stated that there were '88,000 tailoresses in England and 14,000 in London; some were tolerably well paid'. Simcox clarified that many tailoresses were not married and those who were married were obliged to return to work. Mr Stainsby (of the West End Branch of the Tailors Society) also stated that 1,700 tailors had become members of London's Tailors' Society and 'women would not be driven out if they are asked for the proper price for their work'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Edith Simcox, "Eight years of co-operating shirtmaking," *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review* 15, no. 88 (1884); "Co-operative Shirtmaking," *Englishwoman's Review* 14 (April 1877).

<sup>65</sup> Simcox, Edith. "Eight Years of Co-Operating Shirtmaking" *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review* 15, no. 88 (1884): 1037-1054 (1038).

<sup>66</sup> "London Tailoresses Union," *Women's Union Journal* 16 (May 1 1877).

Six days later, on 7 May, the London Tailoresses' Trade Union (LTTU) was formed. On 23 January 1878, the LTTU organized a meeting of tailoresses in the Franklin Hall, Castle Street East. MacDonald and Mr Lake of the AST addressed the meeting. Mrs Paterson, Miss Simcox, Madame Ronniger, Mrs Heatherley (now of the Society of Dressmakers, Milliners and Mantlemakers), Miss Whyte, Mrs Oakley and Miss Addis, a working dressmaker and secretary to the Dressmakers' Society, all spoke.<sup>67</sup> In June 1877, the *Englishwoman's Review* reported that Mr Scott of the London Branch of the Tailors Society hoped that LTTU's numbers would also swell. Although the societies were still in their infancy, Paterson believed that they were already protecting wages from being reduced.<sup>68</sup> By 1878, the LTTU, the AST, the League's Paterson, Oakley, Addis and Whyte and a Miss Geary were meeting regularly to encourage needlewomen across London to join the LTTU.<sup>69</sup>

Miss Geary became the hon secretary to the Westminster and Pimlico LTTU Branch when it was formed in April 1879. Its branch members worked for the Royal Army Clothing Factory in Pimlico and its office was at Stanley House, 2 Chapter Street, Westminster.<sup>70</sup> Geary experienced the difficulties of combining workers who were pitted against each other. Mr Keen had worked for the factory for 22 years. He noted that 219,527 garments had been made as outwork in 'fever dens of London', to which a workwoman added, 'Yes, at Whitechapel'. Another aggrieved woman said that they were not allowed to take work home in case of infection. Taking issue with this slur, she stated, 'Let them go to the contractors' shop in Whitechapel for disease'. She noted that her wages were 'lowered by the rates of pay in Whitechapel' and wanted to 'discover the best means to obtaining a Parliamentary Committee to inquire into their grievances'. Mr Keen spoke of the dismissal and replacement of old hands of 16 or 17 years for girls. He asked where the School Board visitors were? When he noted that now men and girls worked 'indiscriminately'

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<sup>67</sup> "London Tailoresses Trade Union," *Women's Union Journal* 25 (February 1 1878): 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Englishwoman's Review* (June 13 1877): 272.

<sup>69</sup> "London Tailoresses Trade Union," *Women's Union Journal* (26 March 1878): 13.

<sup>70</sup> "Westminster and Pimlico Branch of the London Tailoresses Union," *Women's Union Journal* 46 (November 1 1879).

together, he was perhaps implying that it was inappropriate that women and men were not segregated and that the unskilled did the work of the skilled.

The chairman stated that the factory never intended to compete with 'German sweaters of Whitechapel', but to 'supply work for widows and orphans of soldiers who had served their country'. When trade unionist, Mr Sadler, stated that women made trousers for 1s, the workwomen corrected him, stating 'ten pence, ten pence'. An 'old tailoress' asked the workwomen to stand together because the work was to be taken to Limerick, Ireland, 'where women do better on small wages than the people in London'. There was a resolution to send a petition against the army's contracting out conditions.<sup>71</sup> Such government sweating was also in the East End.<sup>72</sup>

### **Jewish mobilization**

In May 1876, Isaac Stone, Aaron Liebermann and eight others formed the Hebrew Socialist Union in Gun Street, Spitalfields, to mobilize Jews and non-Jews to unite workers 'against their shackles of tyranny and oppression'.<sup>73</sup> By 1879, Jewish radicalization was mobilizing the community.<sup>74</sup> Given the large numbers of Jewish needlewomen in East London, Jewish union combination and mobilization was vital for the trade union movement. On 9 December 1879, tailoress, Miss Rosa Mariner, unionized Jewish tailoresses into the East London Tailoresses' Union (ELTU) under the auspices of the League. She initially held meetings at her home in the radical Jewish area at 30 Sidney Square, Commercial Road, East London. On 10 November 1881, Rev. Barnett lent the ELTU the School House, St Jude's Schoolroom, Commercial Street, Whitechapel. A Mrs Brooke (the Ranee of Sarawak) and the middle-class Miss Honor Brooke arranged entertainment. Son of Jewish-German

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<sup>71</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 55 (Sunday 1 August 1880): 91.

<sup>72</sup> "The London needlewoman," *The Dark Blue* 2, no. 7 (September 1871).

<sup>73</sup> Christine Collette, *For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989). 128; William J. Fishman, *East End Jewish radicals 1875-1914* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2004), 97-134.

<sup>74</sup> Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995), 11.

immigrant tailors, machinist and militant AST representative, Mr Lewis Lyons, spoke alongside Paterson, and former bootmaker, Mr D. F. Schloss (a member of the Jewish Board of Guardians in Whitechapel), on the importance of unions.<sup>75</sup>

On Wednesday, 30 November 1881, at the same location, a R. H. Haddon, Curate of St Botolph Bishopsgate. presided over another ELTU meeting. The Treasurer, Schloss, laid out the union's rules and stated that improvements were being noted in men's work through organization. Once again Schloss noted that legislation of women's work should be looked at with suspicion because it was 'men's legislation'. Schloss warned that the Shop Hours' Bill would lead to the discharge of women and children in favour of men. Miss Augusta Brown agreed, stating that her father had been forced under the Factory Acts to lay off women workers. Wilkinson reported on the Upholsterers' Union and how isolated workers were also unionizing.<sup>76</sup> The Rev. Barnett's words were read to the attendees:

Women possibly are not most stirred through self-interest, they are not most roused to form unions so that they themselves may be better off. The thought of others' needs has never failed to rouse women. Let those present think of others worse off than themselves; of those without hope of better times, of single women, of widows, of wives with husbands unable to work to support a union which will be their hope and defence.<sup>77</sup>

Women workers often had to withstand such patronizing rhetoric. They may well not have responded to such a speech, but their silence would not have negated their materialist agency in their attendance at the meeting. They would have taken the opportunity to share ideas together. Just as non-Jewish male unions still refused to admit female workers, so did most male Jewish trade unions.<sup>78</sup> Jewish Lady Louisa Goldsmid funded the League to pay Miss Augusta Browne, who had

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<sup>75</sup> "London Tailoresses Union," *Women's Union Journal* (1881).

<sup>76</sup> "East London Tailoresses Union," *Women's Union Journal* 71 (December 1 1881): 119.

<sup>77</sup> "East London Tailoresses Union," *Women's Union Journal* 71 (December 1 1881): 119.

<sup>78</sup> Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman's cause: the Jewish woman's movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 112-115.

previously organized garment makers in other areas to organize Jewish women.<sup>79</sup> Despite Barnett's words, in December 1881, Jewish women formed the Whitechapel Tailoresses' Union and based itself at St Jude's Schoolroom. Rosa Mariner became its secretary and a Miss Coe its hon. secretary. Barnett told its mostly unmarried Jewish members that 'unity is strength. However, the union struggled.<sup>80</sup> In 1882, it became the more general East London Workwomen's Society. After three meetings (one in the Phoenix Hall and two at St Jude's Schoolroom), it was dissolved, despite Rosa Mariner's 'tireless' work.<sup>81</sup> Mariner returned to concentrating on mobilizing the ELTU.

By this point many of the male trade unionist leaders in tailoring were supporting the women's union movement. A Mr Barry 'hoped women would never combine against men, for he felt sure that if they did the men would go to the wall'.<sup>82</sup> Despite the working women's difficulties, their political resolve was evident. Some 130 tailoresses' banners caused a spectacle on an excursion to Epping Forest.<sup>83</sup> In 1883, Mrs Kellor replaced Mariner as the ELTU's Secretary and Schloss its Treasurer. For 14 months, they continued to hold meetings on Mondays at 28 Commercial Street.<sup>84</sup> Schloss advocated arbitration with good employers and encouraged workers' independence and self-improvement through savings and educational programmes.<sup>85</sup> In 1883, when the League initiated a study of sweatshop conditions, the Jewish Board of Guardians asked Schloss to undertake another on East London's working conditions.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Clare Midgley, "Ethnicity, 'race' and empire," in *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945. An introduction*, ed. June Purvis (London: Routledge, 2000), 251.

<sup>80</sup> "Whitechapel Tailoresses Trade Union," *Women's Union Journal* 75 (April 1 1881); Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, 152.

<sup>81</sup> WPPL, *Annual report, 1882*: 7.

<sup>82</sup> "The London tailoresses," *Women's Union Journal* 87 (Sunday April 1 1883): 25.

<sup>83</sup> "Tailoresses union excursion," *Women's Union Journal*. 87 (Sunday April 1 1883): 84.

<sup>84</sup> WPPL, *Annual report, 1883*.

<sup>85</sup> Kuzmack, *Woman's cause: the Jewish woman's movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 112.

<sup>86</sup> WPPL, *Annual report, 1883*.

On Sunday, 20 April 1884, the ELTU organized a large meeting to galvanize new members in Zetland Hall, Mansell Street, Aldgate, to 'promote the establishment of a Protective and Provident Union for Jewish Tailoresses'.<sup>87</sup> Some girls arrived after finishing work at 10 p.m., indicating a 'pressing need for some reform'. It demonstrated 'glaring injustice' and employers disregard for the Factory Act that states 'a working day is from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.'. 'Employers considered a full day 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.'. The crowded meeting was 'eager with several questions being asked'.<sup>88</sup> A reporter stated, 'This indicates a singular reversal of attitude to find professed philanthropic support for a trade union'. The reporter advocated that 'the working classes must combine and resolve to insist on a higher standard of comfort'. A speaker stated 'We are glad to find...some prospect of women benefiting from the present movement as well as men. The truest philanthropy is that which saves men from want, and the degradation of having to ask for pecuniary aid'.<sup>89</sup>

Mr F.D. Mocatta noted the increasing numbers of Jewish workers and that 'women's unionization would bring men around to allowing women to be part of a joint union'. Simcox, Paterson, Wilkinson and Brown also spoke. A further meeting was planned at the same venue.<sup>90</sup> However, the meeting venue was moved to Skinner Street Hall, Bishopsgate. It was ticketed, because, as Simcox explained to the attendees, the previous meeting had been infiltrated by small masters. The meeting considered 'the means for improving the position of the East London tailoresses by organisation and union'. The Hon T.W.H. Pelham presided and stated that the League's objective was to 'help working women help themselves'. As had been the case at the previous meeting, some girls arrived after leaving work just before 10 p.m. Some women gave testimonies, but their words were not recorded.

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<sup>87</sup> "A meeting of women in the tailoring trade," *Women's Union Journal* 99 (Tuesday April 1 1884): 29.

<sup>88</sup> "A meeting of women in the tailoring trade," *Women's Union Journal* 99 (Tuesday April 1 1884): 29. "The work of tailoresses," *Women's Union Journal* 100 (Thursday May 1 1884): 39.

<sup>89</sup> "A meeting of women in the tailoring trade," *Women's Union Journal* 99 (Tuesday April 1 1884): 29; "The work of the tailoresses and the Jewish tailoresses in the East End: The Jewish Chronicle on Trade Unions," in *Women's Union Journal* 100 (Thursday May 1 1884): 39, 43.

<sup>90</sup> "A meeting of women in the tailoring trade," *Women's Union Journal* 99 (Tuesday April 1 1884): 29; "The work of the tailoresses and the Jewish tailoresses in the East End: The Jewish Chronicle on Trade Unions," in *Women's Union Journal* 100 (Thursday May 1 1884): 39, 43.

Thereafter, Monday meetings continued to be held at the ELTU's office at Lockhart's Cocoa House.<sup>91</sup> The League's Lady Louisa Goldsmid persuaded the Jewish Board of Guardians to cooperate with the League in its attempts to organize Jewish women garment workers.

By 1884, despite the Jewish community leaders' fear of militancy and anti-Semitism, they supported Lewis Lyons and the ATS's agitation against the sweater. Lyons called people to attend the Brown Bear, Leman Street, Whitechapel, every Sunday at 8 p.m. where 'ladies and gentlemen' were asked 'to assist the fight for rights sweaters have taken away from us'.<sup>92</sup> The campaign gained momentum through the broad labour movement.<sup>93</sup>

### **The League's representation of women workers at the TUC and the anti-protective legislation campaign**

In 1876, whilst women workers were organizing under the auspices of the League, women match makers at the Bryant and May factory, which employed 5,000, initiated a strike.<sup>94</sup> This may well have caught the attention of the TUC's delegates that year. It was the year of the League's first attendance. Whyte and Paterson represented the Societies of Women Bookbinders and Upholsterers, and Simcox represented the Society of Women Shirt and Collar Makers.<sup>95</sup> Simcox read a paper on the organization of women's labour and won male trade unionists' support because it carried the resolution that 'members regard with much satisfaction the development of the self-relying trade union movement among women employed in

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<sup>91</sup> "The work of the tailoresses and the Jewish tailoresses in the East End: The Jewish Chronicle on Trade Unions," in *Women's Union Journal* 100 (Thursday May 1 1884): 39, 43.

<sup>92</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 100 (May 1884), 39.

<sup>93</sup> "East-End workers. II," *The Commonweal* 1, no. 4 (1885): 6, 14, 19, 55.

<sup>94</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 97, 151.

<sup>95</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 19.

the various industries and pledge themselves to assist in its promotion in various localities'.<sup>96</sup>

However, when Paterson and Simcox argued against protective legislation that limited women's work, they incurred the delegates' wrath.<sup>97</sup> Levy suggested that an organized trade would better avoid the undercutting of wages by informing workers of the trade's market wage. He noted that the average male wage was 30s compared to a female wage of 13s 8d per week.<sup>98</sup> Thereafter, at every TUC, Paterson highlighted that many workwomen were not protected by their male relatives and that the regulation of women's rate of pay would also protect the male wage.<sup>99</sup> By September 1881, seven women trade union representatives, including Whyte and Wilkinson, were TUC delegates.<sup>100</sup>

In 1876, Paterson headed an anti-protective legislation deputation to the Factory and Workshop Commission. Mrs Heatherley, secretary to the Society of Dressmakers, Milliners and Mantlemakers, also attended. They reported that, if women were forced under the Factories and Workshop Act, they would take work home, creating 'unwholesome' conditions in the home. On being asked whether the members of the League objected to an act that limited their working hours, Paterson distinguished between working women's and the League's views, stating that some working women did not object to protective legislation. However, Mrs Heatherley was 'very anxious not to give my opinion, but theirs'. So, 'wrote down what they had told me, and I re-read it to them and asked all those that I had seen whether they agree to this, and these are all their own sentiments'.<sup>101</sup> At the 1877 TUC, Mr and Mrs Fawcett's arguments against the act caused such indignation that three delegates

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<sup>96</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* (London: Virago, 1984), 15.

<sup>97</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 10 (November 30 1876): 69.

<sup>99</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 21.

<sup>100</sup> "Trades Union Congress," *Women's Union Journal* 67 (August 1 1881): 83.

<sup>101</sup> "Qu. 2,810 (Mrs Paterson and Mrs Heatherley)," *Royal Commission on Factories and Workshops*, vol. 29 (Report); vol. 30 (Evidence) (1876), in Patricia Hollis, *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 79; Gerry Holloway, *Women and work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), 90-91.

shouted, 'Get this Bill passed, and then we shall agitate to get women excluded from the labour market'.<sup>102</sup>

In 1879, the League facilitated Liberal forums organized by Rev. J Oakley of St Saviour, Hoxton, where trade unionists spoke at a series of Saturday talks on 'Trade Unions for Women's Industry'. It was agreed that, besides encouraging female unions, the forum would collect and publish information on women's working conditions. At a second conference, Organisation of Women's Industry, in March 1879, it was agreed that 'amongst women workers there was no lack of public spirit or want of ability to appreciate higher views of their position, and the duty of working for others, as well as themselves'.<sup>103</sup> The League's representatives had to respond to critical questions, such as Was it not better that working-class women enter domestic service, than earn a miserly 5s or 6s a week in a factory? Levy responded that women preferred factory starvation wages and their freedom to domestic slavery and confinement, without even a Sunday off. Brown took issue with the hypocrisy of the employers' restriction of servant freedom to protect their morality. In response to the criticism that the League encouraged 'impulsive' women workers to strike, Levy responded that League society members had such industrial strength that they would not have to resort to striking. He also noted that three of the League's London's 'unions' were self-supporting. A Mrs Berberry questioned the effectiveness of such cooperation because wages were not standardized and women workers too numerous. Instead, she suggested women workers' emigration would be more effective.<sup>104</sup>

Working women's responses to these statements are not recorded, but Paterson was now growing impatient with middle-class do-gooders who wished 'people who lived on 7/- a week to be provident'. She was tired of the wealthy's denial of the cause of poverty. Having lost her faith in entente cordiales with good employers she wished to rename the League the "Women's Provident Trade Union League." She hoped that the League would eventually become redundant because

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<sup>102</sup> "Trades Union Congress," *The Times* (London, England), September 21 1877.

<sup>103</sup> "Trades unions for women's industry," *London Evening Standard*, March 17 1879, 2.

<sup>104</sup> "Trades unions for women's industry," *London Evening Standard*, March 17 1879, 2.

women workers would be able to protect and represent themselves through a Women's Council.<sup>105</sup>

As the economy and poverty worsened, a range of middle-class responses developed. The League supported the Women's League for the Spread of Co-operation, which became the Co-operative Women's Guild, and then, in 1885, became the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG). Its mantra of the power of women consumers through domestic economy and cooperation attracted skilled workers' wives. The WCG lobbied the Industrial Remuneration Conference to protect married women and mothers through minimum homeworkers and domestic labour wages.<sup>106</sup> By 1893, the WCG had 51 guilds. Although located in the outskirts of East London, its ethos was evident in its industrial centre.<sup>107</sup> As workers' threat of revolt grew, Andrew Mearns' description of East London's inhabitants as "outcasts" from society in 1883 only encouraged fear.<sup>108</sup> A fearful middle-class response lay in a theory of urban degeneration, which stated that a deprived individual's intellect degenerated into uncontrollable primitive desires. Medical science, sanitary improvement and humanitarian legislation were blamed for enabling the unfit to reach maturity and multiply. Now the unfit needed to be weeded out.<sup>109</sup> The myriad of middle-class responses to working-class poverty homogenized the poor into anything from uncouth loafers and criminals to innocent, passive and docile victims.

### **Socialist Fabian Society versus the Marxist Social Democratic Federation**

It is in this context that the Fabian Society evolved middle-class social responsibility. While trudging East London's streets during the 1870s, COS worker,

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<sup>105</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* (London: Virago, 1984), 24.

<sup>106</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 117-118; Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918," PhD, (University of Sussex, 1995) 61-66; Jean Gaffin, "Women and cooperation," in *Women in the Labour movement*, ed. Lucy Middleton (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 113-142.

<sup>107</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 118, 124.

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Mearns, *The bitter cry of outcast London: an inquiry in the condition of the abject poor* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1883).

<sup>109</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 285-287.

Beatrice Webb, formulated her political understanding of poverty and gender. Webb's view of separate spheres stemmed from her own experience of running her father's home, where she was forced to read her intellectual studies unobserved during the early hours of the morning. Believing in the 'holiness of motherhood', she did not question the biology of gender roles. However, she also did not question her right to speak out. She saw herself as part of the 'class of persons who habitually gave orders, but who seldom, if ever, executed the orders of others'.<sup>110</sup> She broke away from free market liberalism that created 'unrestrained competition' and renounced unjust capitalist exploitation of workers. She evolved an 'essentially middle-class' evangelical view of responsibility of shaping the moral world of others.<sup>111</sup> Webb developed Fabian Socialism that rejected laissez-faire capitalism in its calls to end the class war through the alleviation of poverty.<sup>112</sup> Although the Fabian Society supported trade unionism and collectivism it saw the intellectual middle class as 'stewards of the poor' through a 'culture of altruism'. Change would come through class shaming, not revolution, as advocated by the Irish nationalists, the Marxist revolutionary Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Labour Emancipation League. As Ruth Cavendish wrote, 'no Socialist has ever come from the slums'.<sup>113</sup>

Henry Mayer Hyndman founded the Marxist SDF in 1884 as 'the fighting labour party of Great Britain' to overthrow capitalism and that 'union is strength'.<sup>114</sup> It recognized class struggle as necessary to create a classless society and, through its

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<sup>110</sup> Barbara Caine, "Beatrice Webb and the 'woman question'," *History Workshop Journal* 14, no. 1 (1982).

<sup>111</sup> Gabrielle Mearns, "'Long trudges through Whitechapel': the East End of Beatrice Webb's and Clara Collet's social investigations," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth century* 13 (2011): 1-20 (1-3); Rosemary Jann, "Fabian socialism and the rhetoric of gentility," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, no. 41 (2013): 727-742 (727-278).

<sup>112</sup> Peter Beilharz and Chris Nyland, *The Webbs, Fabianism and feminism: Fabianism and the political economy of everyday life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 54-56, 59.

<sup>113</sup> Rosemary Jann, "Fabian socialism and the rhetoric of gentility," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41 (2013): 728; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, (New York: New York University, 1995), 161-2.

<sup>114</sup> "Union is strength" " *Justice: the organ of social democracy* June 11<sup>th</sup> 1887, H.M. Hyndman, "The work of the future," *Justice* August 24 1887: 1.

newspaper, *Justice*, it asked its members to 'Educate, Agitate, Organise'.<sup>115</sup> The SDF believed in structural reform, state provision of housing and education, a reduced working day, progressive income tax, the nationalization of railways, banks and land, and democratic representation through the electoral system.<sup>116</sup> Hyndman did not believe that trade unions would win permanent worker protection; especially as only a fraction of workers were trade union members. However, in September 1884, he spoke directly to the 'Trades Unions of Great Britain' to encourage trade unionism and industrial militancy.<sup>117</sup> Although Hyndman held the traditional anti-feminist view that a woman's place was in the home and not the labour market, he included women workers in his call to militancy.<sup>118</sup> Despite the SDF member, MP John Burns, of the Amalgamated Engineers Union, holding similar views, many women went to hear him speak.<sup>119</sup>

*Justice* reported that, at the 1884 Radical Conference, 10 delegates opposed the motion for women's suffrage.<sup>120</sup> Hyndman's article 'Women's Labour' stated that 'wage slaves' should 'band together against the slave drivers who enslave you'. Although he acknowledged independent women with dependents, he stated that the female worker cheapens labour and degenerates a nation:

Woman's labour under the capitalist rule is harmful to the men who are their husbands and brothers, undercutting their wages and throwing them out of work, is injurious to themselves by lowering their strength and spoiling their beauty; and is utterly ruinous of their children who,

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<sup>115</sup> Social Democratic Federation, *Socialism made plain: being the social and political manifesto of the Social Federation* (London: London: Offices of the Social Democratic Federation; the Modern Press; W. Reeves, 1884);

<sup>116</sup> "The East-End agitation: enthusiastic meeting at Limehouse," *Justice* (November 8 1884)

<sup>117</sup> "The Social Democratic Federation to the Trade Unions of Great Britain: The Trade Union Congress by a trade unionist," *Justice* 1, no. 35 (September 13 1884): 4-5, 13.

<sup>118</sup>H. Quelch, "Women and Socialism," *Justice* (July 16 1887)

<sup>119</sup> *Justice* (July 12 1884); H.M. Hyndman, "The Demonstration," *Justice* (July 16 1884).

<sup>120</sup> "The Radical Conference," *Justice* (February 2 1884).

under our present family system of bringing up children are neglected and half-fed.<sup>121</sup>

John Brooke advocated:

The expulsion of married women from forges, workshops and place of manufacture; for not merely does their employment in these places bring about reduction of wages it also tends to deform children before birth.<sup>122</sup>

While John L. Mahon stated, 'women are not interested in the Socialist movement as much as they ought', he admitted that the 'lot of the woman is much greater than that of the man'. When highlighting the plight of needlewomen who produced the latest bourgeois fashions, he stated that 'if all the factory girls joined the socialist movement such exploitation would cease to exist'.<sup>123</sup>

Despite these anti-feminist views, both Amie Hicks and Eleanor Aveling (née Marx) were executive SDF members and spoke alongside Hyndman and Burns. Hicks and Aveling spoke to huge open-air meetings held at Mile End Waste, Clerkenwell Green and smaller audiences in public houses. Hicks spoke out against emigration schemes 'to rid the country of its unemployed'. She took issue with the Bishop of Bedford at the Church Congress who suggested that the solution was to 'educate the poor in the desire for more comfortable homes'.<sup>124</sup> Hicks highlighted the Liberals' role in capitalist society's class oppression that maintained women's unequal place in the labour market.<sup>125</sup> *Justice* also printed more feminist views, such

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<sup>121</sup> "Woman's Labour," *Justice* (March 22 1884): 3.

<sup>122</sup> "Women in workshops," *Justice* (December 1884).

<sup>123</sup> "Women under capitalism," *Justice* (December 20 1884).

<sup>124</sup> "State organisation of unemployed labour: as an alternative to the harmful scheme of state aided emigration," *Justice* 34 (Saturday October 4 1884): 7; "Church Congress," *Justice* 39 (Saturday October 11 1884): 1.

<sup>125</sup> "The Radical Conference," *Justice* (February 2 1884); H.M. Hyndman, "Women's labour," *Justice* (Saturday March 22 1884); John Brooke, "Women in workshops," (December 21 1884).

as that of H. H. Clarke, of 1 Greenwood Road, Dalston, who argued the most 'precious principles of Socialism – the absolute equality of rights of all men and women'.<sup>126</sup> "M.C." argued that 'women and children have been coupled together in contempt' and now women are 'steadily demanding a hearing' and the 'fullest possible enfranchisement and political education'.<sup>127</sup>

SDF members, William Morris and Eleanor Aveling, in recognition of women's rights and needs for wages, broke away from the SDF and formed the Socialist League.<sup>128</sup> In 1885, however, when the Socialist League was taken over by anarchists, Morris and Marx returned to the SDF. They continued to edit its newspaper, *The Commonweal*, to expose workers' exploitation and encourage political agency. For example, they printed workers' songs to sing on demonstrations.<sup>129</sup> Edward and Eleanor Aveling highlighted the founder of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party, Ferdinand August Bebel's perspective on the 'woman question'. Bebel stated that the struggle for women's emancipation and equality of the sexes was a prerequisite for any effective form of progressive social revolution. He recognized women's exclusion from opportunities to develop their intelligence and that women have faculty that men do not have.<sup>130</sup> Advocating complete equality, Bebel states 'political rights would awaken female consciousness of their political duties, but that reform will only be possible with the radical transformation of social conditions'.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> "To the Editor of Justice," *Justice* (April 22 1884).

<sup>127</sup> M.C. "Women in politics," *Justice* 23, no. 1 (June 21 1884): 5.

<sup>128</sup> Babara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (London: Virago, 1983), xiv-xv.

<sup>129</sup> "*The Commonweal: the official journal of the Socialist League*," ed. William Morris (London: Socialist League, 1885-1894); University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, "Commonweal February 1887", in Papers of William Wess, MSS.240/W/1/3.

<sup>130</sup> "Woman and Socialism: first notice," *Justice* 75, no. 2 (June 20 1885): 2; "Woman and Socialism: second notice," *Justice* (July 4 1885): 2; Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a life*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).262.

<sup>131</sup> "Woman and socialism: second notice," *Justice* (July 4 1885): 2.

The Avelings recognized the working woman's bondage to domestic drudgery, industrial exploitation and economic oppression.<sup>132</sup> Some in the SDF were still asking 'Is it expedient to admit women to Parliament?' The SDF stated that women had to persuade their male peers of female worthiness with arguments of their good sense. 'Given woman's management of the domestic they would use their power in a sensible manner in line with the male political will'.<sup>133</sup> Although Hicks took issue with the SDF's view of 'manhood' suffrage, as opposed to adulthood suffrage, she encouraged women's participation at SDF rallies and demonstrations.<sup>134</sup> Hicks used rhetoric reminiscent of Chartist women to remind women of their militant strength and endurance and that they can rise from the depths of their poverty and degradation with men and sweep away their wrongs.<sup>135</sup> As poverty worsened, militancy increased. In response to Rev. Mearns' calling of East London "outcast", in 1885, the SDF undertook a survey of working-class poverty and published its findings in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. It found that 25% of Londoners lived in abject poverty.<sup>136</sup>

In January 1885, capitalists and trade unionists attended the Industrial Renumeration Conference at which Liberal MP, Sir Charles Dilke, stated in his opening speech 'if the capitalists prove to be a useless class in society they would have to go'.<sup>137</sup> The SDF interrupted the meeting to denounce Tory exploitation of unemployment and called for a programme of socialism and revolution. Tension erupted into a riot. The SDF organized other tense gatherings, such as one under

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<sup>132</sup> Karen Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23, 25

<sup>133</sup> "Is it expedient to admit women to Parliament?" *Justice* 2, no. 100 (December 19 1885): 4.

<sup>134</sup> Amie Hicks, "Adult not manhood suffrage: to the editor of *Justice*," *Justice* (September 24 1887): 3.

<sup>135</sup> Amie Hicks, "Women and Socialism (from a working woman's point of view)," *Justice* (April 25 1885).

<sup>136</sup> Tim Butler and Chris Hannett, *Ethnicity, class and aspiration: understanding London's new East End* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011), 40; Albert Fried and Richard M. Elman, *Routledge Revivals: Charles Booth's London (1969) : A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century, Drawn from His "Life and Labour of the People in London,"* (London: Routledge, 2019) 30.

<sup>137</sup> London, Senate House "The Industrial Renumeration Conference," *Justice* (July 7 1885): 2. Burnings Press cuttings.

the banner of 'Not Charity But Work'.<sup>138</sup> Another was held on 12 April 1885. Starting in Limehouse and amassed between 4,000 and 6,000 workers. It culminated in Hyde Park where the masses demanded that working days would be compulsorily restricted to eight hours in all trades.<sup>139</sup> They then marched to speak to an "unavoidably absent" Sir Dilke at the Cabinet Council.<sup>140</sup> At a meeting in Dodd Street, radicals from Stepney Green, the Socialist League, the SDF and the Labour Emancipation League spoke to 7,000 people. When the police arrived, they arrested many, including Amie Hicks, who stated that 'this meeting of workers protest against the attempt of the Police, at the bidding of the privileged classes, to interfere with the right of freedom of speech'.<sup>141</sup>

The Marxist labour movement and workers were clear that the evangelical philanthropic Liberal and Tory could no longer philosophize on the economic plight of 'worn torn victims'. In Stepney, Limehouse and Poplar, the SDF agitated against the 'smug middle class'.<sup>142</sup>

In the East of London where men work hardest, longest, produce the most wealth, enjoy the least and die the soonest, is the quarter of the poor – the West where men work the least, spend the most, enjoy the greatest luxuries, live the longest, is the residence of the smug middle class.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society* (London: Verso, 2010), 296.

<sup>139</sup> "Demonstration of the unemployed," *Justice* (February 1885); "Demonstration in Hyde Park," *Justice* (April 12 1885).

<sup>140</sup> London, Senate House, *The unemployed of London mass meeting today. The mob charged by the Police, 1885*. Burns Press cuttings. MS1079/3.

<sup>141</sup> H.W Lee, "The free speech demonstration at Dodd Street," *Justice* 89 (September 26 1885): 2.

<sup>142</sup> A.P. Hazell, "The smug middle-class," *Justice* 2, no. 104 (January 9 1886): 2.

<sup>143</sup> A.P. Hazell, "The smug middle-class," *Justice* 2, no. 104 (January 9 1886): 2.

The SDF's membership grew. At its height it gained 4,500, mostly male, members.<sup>144</sup> The SDF Clerkenwell branch lobbied the Local Board of Works and the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Poor for housing improvements.<sup>145</sup> At another 'great meeting of the unemployed in Clerkenwell' the SDF invited MPs to answer to 'the 3,000 distressed'.<sup>146</sup> Bethnal Green's Labour Emancipation League lobbied for the 'abolition of landlordism'.<sup>147</sup>

Socialist League member, Henry Hyde Champion, who became a supporter of the Ropemakers Union documented in Chapter 7, believed class alliances to be useful. He further believed that the middle class could be converted to lobby for protective legislation to shorten the working day and the compulsory minimum wage. He also thought that middle-class shareholders could ensure that employers were not forced to exploit their workers.<sup>148</sup> Many women believed that the Matrimonial Causes Acts Amendments Bill 1878 had given working-class women rights to protect their own earnings and sue absent husbands for maintenance. However, many believed that it had institutionalized blame for capitalist exploitation on working class 'lazy, feckless' husbands.<sup>149</sup>

Amie Hicks, Annie Besant and Eleanor Marx all stood as SDF candidates for School Boards and Boards of Guardians. In 1888, Hicks became the only Labour candidate representative for Marylebone. She clearly stated her class agenda: 'I know a great deal about the inconvenience which the rules cause to the working classes and I intend (if returned) to do my utmost to make myself felt at the Board and remove these inconveniences'.<sup>150</sup> As described in Chapter 4, Hicks understood

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<sup>144</sup> James D. Young, *Socialism and the English working class: a social history of English labour, 1883-1939* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989), 19-20; Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911*, 204.

<sup>145</sup> "The unemployed agitation," *Justice* 2, no. 107 (January 30 1886): 4.

<sup>146</sup> "Great meeting of the unemployed in Clerkenwell," *Justice* (February 6 1886): 3.

<sup>147</sup> "Labour Emancipation League," *Justice* (April 1886).

<sup>148</sup> "Converting the middle class," *Justice* 177 (April 10 1886).

<sup>149</sup> Sonya O. Rose, *Limited livelihoods: gender and class in nineteenth-century England*, (London: Routledge, 1992) 63.

<sup>150</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks", *Women's Penny Paper* 5 (Saturday November 24 1888): 1.

her electorate's resentment of the State's evangelical preaching, when she assured them that religious teaching should be taught in homes and not schools.<sup>151</sup>

As intersections were being made in the broad labour movement, its various political visions were merging. Socialist League Council members, Polish Mrs Gertrude Guillaume-Schaack, Annie Taylor and Miss Robinson, were 3 of 12 committee members who initiated the Women's Union. The Women's Union encouraged women industrial workers to combine at its meetings at Gracechurch Cocoa Rooms, 63 Aldersgate Street.<sup>152</sup> The SDF were now recognizing the League's work in mobilizing women against poverty and ignorance in its call for 'women to the front', but stated Socialism as the ultimate outcome.<sup>153</sup> League and SDF member, Simcox, stated 'nothing but a complete revolution' would change the labouring classes' position.<sup>154</sup> As Socialist League members, William Morris and Eleanor Aveling were stating that cooperatives would help overcome sweating, Jeannette Wilkinson was strengthening her Liberal ties whilst focusing on education, suffrage and Irish home rule.<sup>155</sup>

Women's trade unionism was making headway at the TUC. In 1886, it allowed women delegates in all but two trades. The Women's Upholstresses Society's committee proposed a conference on the 'Position of Working Women'.<sup>156</sup> Approximately 2,500 women workers were members of the League's trade societies, of which half were in the London area.<sup>157</sup> The League had provided the platform for a

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<sup>151</sup> "Interview: Mrs Amie Hicks", *Women's Penny Paper* 5 (Saturday November 24 1888): 1.

<sup>152</sup> "The Women's Union," *Commonweal: the official journal of the Socialist League* (London, England) 1885; *Justice* [last week in March [1886]; *The Commonweal*:. First week in April [1886/7].

<sup>153</sup> "Women to the front," *Justice* (August 22 1885).

<sup>154</sup> "The Industrial Renumeration Conference," *The Commonweal* (March 1885); "The Industrial Renumeration Conference," *Justice* (February 7 1885): 2.

<sup>155</sup> Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, *Dignity and daily bread: new forms of economic organising among poor women in the Third World and the First* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 161-166; Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 235.

<sup>156</sup> *Women's Union Journal* 12, no. 36 (Saturday May 1 1887): 33.

<sup>157</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions : an outline history of women in the British trade union movement*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1977) p. 70

generation of working women to mobilize. While Rev. Barnett of Toynbee Hall was still convincing Whitechapel's tailoresses to combine over tea, 400 envelope machinists at Turner and Appletons were striking.<sup>158</sup> In June 1886, Paterson died. A member of the Society for Women Employed in Bookbinding remembered when she would attend their meetings for three months and they 'had her all to ourselves every Monday night. I never missed once – used to long for them...I think we all caught her spirit'.<sup>159</sup> Jeannette Wilkinson also died in 1886. Like Paterson, Wilkinson's sympathy for women workers' experience and 'accurate knowledge of it' gave her an influence in 'public and private life'.<sup>160</sup> Such was their influence that, in 1892, the League fundraised for a memorial for both Wilkinson and Emma Paterson because they 'were the only genuine labour leaders workwomen had'.<sup>161</sup>

## Conclusion

Between 1874 and 1886, the League became a catalyst for, and conduit of, women workers' agency to protect themselves. At the very least, the League provided space for women workers to meet. Workers' reported attendance at meetings indicated their volition to organize themselves and their materialist agency. During this period, class intersection in the labour force, trade unions and charities created a complex broad labour movement that some employers supported. Emma Paterson and the working-class secretaries won the respect of women workers and middle-class benefactors alike. Paterson facilitated women workers' representation at the TUC. It was through this class intersection that parts of civil society changed their political perspectives. Like Mary Zugg, Eleanor Whyte, Elizabeth Mears, Jeannette Wilkinson, Rosa Mariner and Amie Hicks were role models of agency as they became increasingly irrepressible, even transformative, hegemonic bridges between workers and civil society. As they spoke on platforms with people of greater given power, they initiated the bottoming up of the labour movement. They

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<sup>158</sup> *Justice*, (March 1886); *The Commonweal*, First week in April [1886/7].

<sup>159</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978). 15.

<sup>160</sup> Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 16; Eliza Orme, "Obituary for Jeanette Wilkinson," *Englishwoman's Review* (London) September 1886.

<sup>161</sup> "The Women's Trade Union League," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday May 19 1892.

highlighted working women's industrial lowness as part of an international class of exploited slop worker. Although there is no evidence that Paterson and Hicks spoke on the same podium, they must have been aware of each other. Hicks, like Paterson, was clearly aware of the importance of class intersection and workers' representation within the state as she stood as a school board candidate. During this period, women workers' respectability grew as they were increasingly accepted in the public sphere of the labour force.

However, class intersection only developed so far. While civil society provided meeting spaces and food, the middle classes' sense of superiority often revealed class difference as they spoke at workers as opposed to speaking with them. By the 1880s the state had become a sweater. Paterson had grown weary of trying to encourage employers to be good and civil society to recognize workers' exploitation. Although Beatrice Webb recognized middle-class responsibility for poverty, her stance was not one of equality. Women workers' materialist agency was mounting as they organized themselves into unions and organized meetings in pubs and coffee houses, such as Lockharts Cocoa House. They were also joining large demonstrations and making their corporal agency felt. However, in 1886, most working women's voices still went unrecorded, even in newspapers whose readerships were workers and trade unionists. As poverty increased and the middle-class misrepresentation of workers as outcasts burgeoned class tension, ideas of womanhood split the broad labour movement as the Fabian Society and the SDF developed their political visions. Although working-class women participated in these platforms, they did not passively assimilate into these political visions.

## Chapter 7:1886-1900: New Unionism: 'unorganizable' women organize

### Introduction

Economic depression and increased mechanization exacerbated hazardous sweated working conditions. Women workers remained vulnerable to sexual harassment, victimization and dismissal. Communities became pitted against each other until their anger and resentment became the catalyst for their solidarity. Working women became increasingly irrepressible as they participated in unemployment "riots", political and trade union demonstrations and meetings. The infamous 1888 women match makers' strike galvanized East London's labour geographies. As it instigated new unionism, the labour movement recognized the political power of working women's agency. Civil society and the labour movement increasingly intersected in their support for women's trade unionism. It is in this context that Amie Hicks helped form the middle-class platform, the Women's Trade Union Association to help women workers unionize themselves. By the 1890s, there were shifts within sections of the women's movement away from philanthropic 'laissez-faire liberal feminism towards a more socialist understanding of the issues facing working-class women workers; along with an acceptance of state legislation and methodical social investigation into working conditions.<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin argued that the working woman could expect nothing from the bourgeois women's movement who wished for feminist liberation whilst retaining their class privilege. However, she also recognized that by supporting the bourgeois women's demands for equality the woman worker could arm herself in her struggle for equality.<sup>2</sup> The labour movement was fraught with political differences, which at times blurred, and at other times heightened.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Livesey, "The Politics of Work: Feminism, Professionalisation and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004): 233-237.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 64-65.

## New unionism: “unorganizable” women organize

After Paterson’s death, Lady Emilia Dilke became the League’s President, who, until her death in 1905, supported the League with an annual £100.00 contribution.<sup>3</sup> Dilke re-orientated the League to support protective legislation and the idea of the male family breadwinner wage. She firmly disassociated the League from industrial militancy. Instead of following Paterson’s wishes to rename the League the Women’s Provident Trade Union League, she limited it to the Women’s Provident League.<sup>4</sup> Despite Dilke and Edith Simcox’s political differences, Simcox became the League’s acting Secretary until Clementina Black took over as permanent Secretary in February 1887.<sup>5</sup> As 1887 became a year of demonstrations, civil society increasingly hoped that trade unions would help quell working-class dissent. Florence Nightingale publicly announced her financial contributions to the League for its ‘brave’ work.<sup>6</sup> New contributors followed suit, but dissent continued. On ‘Bloody Sunday’, 13 November 1887, an estimated 1,000 angry unemployed people and workers per acre crowded into Spitalfields. Their confrontation with the police reached a new height and an estimated 120,000 people attended a victim’s funeral at Bow cemetery.<sup>7</sup> By 1888, the League’s accounts show that there were 360 contributors with a balance of £285.<sup>8</sup>

Women workers’ resentment at having nothing to lose moulded their volition and subsequent agency. In June 1888, 26-year-old Irishwoman Sarah Chapman created an historical turning point. Tired of the constant wage deductions and

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<sup>3</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Constance Fulmer, "Edith Simcox: feminist critic and reformer," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31, no. 1 (1998): 105-121 (111); Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 29.

<sup>6</sup> "Miss Nightingale’s letter," *Women’s Union Journal* 12, no. 136 (May 1887): Front page.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Bales, "Popular reactions to sociological research: the case of Charles Booth," *Sociology* 33, no. 1 (1999): 54; Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939* (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995), 107.

<sup>8</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 33.

working conditions, she encouraged 1,400 destitute 'unskilled' women and girl match makers to walk out of Bryant and May's match factory in Fairfield Road, Bow.<sup>9</sup> Never before had there been such a large women's strike. Many match women workers were "respectably" married to dockers unionized in the Dock Labourers' Union. Huge sways of match makers and dockers were Irish. The docks and match factories were the largest employers of male and female casual labour which existed at the base of the labour hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> Social conditions had evidently declined since the 1860s when William Pollard-Urquhart found that Irish dockers were more fortunate.<sup>11</sup> Despite the match women's dangerous working conditions and minimal wages stigmatizing them into the lowest strata of society, hundreds were waiting to replace them in the factory.<sup>12</sup> *Justice* noted that the strike was not a middle-class initiative but a 'revolt against injustice, tyranny and brutality'.<sup>13</sup>

*Home and Hearth* reported that when the 'wet and bedraggled' match maker women workers turned up for their first meeting their good humour hid their anxieties.<sup>14</sup> Like the bible binders, the match makers did not have a platform to speak from. They approached Annie Besant, who spoke on platforms for socialist and Irish causes, to speak publicly for them.<sup>15</sup> Their solidarity helped them overcome their fears. Frances Hicks noted that 'factory girls always have girl-mates' and were

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<sup>9</sup> Samantha Johnson, "Sarah Chapman, Matchgirl Strike Leader," accessed May 20 2019, <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2018/06/26/sarah-chapman-matchgirl-strike-leader/>.

<sup>10</sup> WPPL, *Annual report*, 1889; Ann Stafford, *A match to the fire* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 15; Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 42, 46-47, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Jankiewicz, "A dangerous class: the street sellers of nineteenth-century London," *Journal of Social History* 46. 2: 394-399.

<sup>12</sup> "Matchmakers' strike," *Justice* (Saturday July 14 1888); Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 1, 9, 14, 36, 41.

<sup>13</sup> "The match girls," *Justice* (Saturday July 14 1888).

<sup>14</sup> By a lady contributor, "Hearth and home," *Manchester Times* (Manchester) 1621, Saturday August 4 1888.

<sup>15</sup> Besant, Annie, *An autobiography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), 333-338.

ready to look out for one another in times of trouble.<sup>16</sup> Women workers, like the match makers, consolidated their outer confidence in their distinctive dress and loudness as they travelled through the streets in tough lively gangs. Despite their tough image, they existed in relative harmony.<sup>17</sup> Although Booth found these 'independent urban poor women' 'warm-hearted and honest', he believed their behaviour 'reflective of their low moral standards' and was 'socially deviating and dangerous'. Booth distinguished a person's class by their demeanour. Women workers were either 'factory girls', or 'girls who worked in a factory'.<sup>18</sup> Such distinctions were probably the reason why women workers demonstrated their confidence in the public sphere, as seen in Figure 35 below.



**Figure 35: Factory Girls c1900**

(Source: Museum of London)

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<sup>16</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 42; Frances Hicks, "Factory girls," in *The New Party*, ed. Andrew Reid ([s.l.]: [s.n.], 1895), 224.

<sup>17</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history*, 42, 46-47, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Chinn, *They worked all their lives: women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2006), 93.

East London consolidated and galvanized its support for the match makers' strike. From March to 25 June 1888, tailoresses collected £8.96 for their strike fund.<sup>19</sup> Socialist journalist and trade unionist, Margaret E. Harkness, was not convinced by union militancy. She urged strikers to remember the homeworkers 'thrown out of work'. She reminded them that whole families depended upon 2½d per gross of match boxes. Yet Harkness also noted that sweating saw wives of clerks and tradesmen being 'rushed beneath the juggernaut of competition'.<sup>20</sup> The League did not support the match women's militancy. Its donor, Millicent Fawcett, was a Bryant and May shareholder. To seek out the truth, Fawcett questioned the match women at their club. She found that the women workers were confident and seemed content as they sang while they worked and did not complain of poor working conditions. Upon being given access to the factory to investigate working conditions, Fawcett concluded that working conditions were satisfactory.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, the League suggested that Bryant and May should be boycotted.<sup>22</sup> After three weeks, the strikers' conditions were agreed to. The strike instigated new unionism, which saw working women of their own volition organize through their materialist agency and become a political and corporeal force in the labour movement. Their agency from below empowered the League's Secretary, Clementina Black, to introduce an equal pay resolution at the 1888 TUC.<sup>23</sup>

The state's alarm at such industrial chaos turned to consternation with the *Lancet's* 1888 report of the spread of infectious disease through the garment trade. The state intently scrutinized the poor's lives to identify the causes and solutions for poverty. The Fabian Society and Charles Booth undertook inquiries into workers'

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<sup>19</sup> WPPL, *Annual report, 1888*.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret E. Harkness, "Home industries," *Justice* 241 (Saturday August 25 1888).

<sup>21</sup> London, L.S.E. The Women's Library, Millicent Fawcett papers 7MGF/C, Streatfeild papers Streatfeild/1/25/40

<sup>22</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 20, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920), 20; Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British Trade Unions, 1874-1976* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 30-34; Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 91.

lives.<sup>24</sup> Beatrice Webb presented her investigative findings into East London's sweated workforce at the 1888 Committee of the House of Lords inquiry into the sweating system. The Committee formerly defined sweating as:

1. a rate of wages inadequate to the necessities of the worker or disproportionate to the work done;
2. excessive hours of labour; and
3. an insanitary state of the house in which the work is carried on.<sup>25</sup>

The inquiry noted that the most sweated were homeworkers. Moses informed the inquiry that some sweaters were so successful that they had become pillars of the community.<sup>26</sup>

In 1889, the dockers followed the women match makers into a strike. The dockers' strike has been written into history as having initiated the 'birth' of new unionism as the 'whole labour class rose against exploitation'.<sup>27</sup> On a Monday, 40 Jewish women in Bethnal Green, angered at the deductions taken by their government contractor, Herbert & Co, came out on strike. By the Tuesday, 15,000 men and women became 'infected by the strike of the dockers' and 'half of the East End was out'.<sup>28</sup> 'There were 50 strikes in the five-mile radius of East London over the summer of 1889'. As workers at Crosse and Blackwell's jam factory and Charrington's brewery struck, so did 6,000 male and female Jewish tailors. The tailors stayed out until the end of September. Solidarity was at its height. 'Black men' announced that they 'will not do the work white men won't do'. On 21 August,

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<sup>24</sup> *Lancet* (March 3 1888): 430-431, in Sheila Blackburn, "'Princesses and sweated-wage slaves go well together': images of British sweated workers, 1843-1914," *International Labour and Working Class History* 61 (Spring 2002): 31-34.

<sup>25</sup> Jenny Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Brookfield, V.T., USA: Gower, 1986), 8.

<sup>26</sup> House of Lords, *First-(second) report[s] from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the sweating system: together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix* (London, 1888).

<sup>27</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *A short history of the British working-class movement: 1789-1947*, (London: TUC, 1947), 15.

<sup>28</sup> "Tailors," *Commonweal* (London: Socialist League) ([March]1889); Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 2.

100,000 people processioned to the music of seven bands to Hyde Park where John Burns reminded the crowds of the inspirational match maker women. On 25 August, jam and biscuit makers also struck.<sup>29</sup> On 27 August, Burns once again reminded the crowds of the match women's agency. Banners lined the main thoroughfare, Commercial Road.<sup>30</sup> The Union of Women Match Makers was still in existence in December 1893 with an office at 193 Bow Road.<sup>31</sup> During its existence it mobilized many women workers.

Despite the League's lack of support for their strike, the Union of Women Match Makers asked the League to help organize Bryant and May's matchbox makers, and workers in the jam, sweets and pickle factories.<sup>32</sup> Lady Dilke met 300 box makers and found them taking a 'very intelligent interest in the suggestion made to them from the platform with regard to improving their condition'. The box makers told her that they 'had no time' and 'combining homeworkers would be difficult'.<sup>33</sup> Middle-class League member, Irishwoman Miss May Abraham, visited the Old Nichol, Bethnal Green, to 'lecture' the home-based matchbox makers on the advantages of joining a union. One worker told her 'We're driving out life to keep it in, at this 'ere sweat work'. We only earn '1s for 12 hours work', and boxes were being made more 'cheaply abroad and fill England'.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps, like the match makers, the box makers' vulnerability was not sustainable, and they had to do something. They formed the Matchbox Makers' Union. Irishwoman Mrs Reilly became its secretary, and box maker, Mrs Clem

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<sup>29</sup> H. W. Hobart, "Trade Unions or benefit societies?," *Justice*: (Saturday May 25 1889): 280.

<sup>30</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 156, 165-168.

<sup>31</sup> London, L.S.E. Women's Trade Union Association. *Annual report*. WIC/13/56.

<sup>32</sup> Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918" (PhD University of Sussex, 1995), 43; Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 20, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Women's Protective and Provident League, "A match box makers' union." 16<sup>th</sup> Annual report July 1890, 10; Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 63.

<sup>34</sup> "Labour and wages," *Reynolds Newspaper*, Sunday September 7 1890.

Edwards, helped 'on a daily basis'. Over the subsequent 18 months, several box makers joined the union and attended meetings at Father Jay's School in Bethnal Green.<sup>35</sup> A Rev. Osborne also provided a meeting space in his Holy Trinity Church on Old Nichol Street, on 23 November 1889. The box makers were descended upon by Lady Dilke, Mr Pickersgill MP, Miss Florence Routledge BA, Mrs Barber, Miss Emilia Holyoake and the Bishop of Bedford. Eleanor Whyte also accompanied them.<sup>36</sup> In December 1890, the Matchbox Makers Union, after comparing their working conditions with other box makers, combined into a larger union. Spurred on by the women, male matchstick makers in Shoreditch struck. Unemployed women matchbox makers joined the men as they marched through East London to the Great Assembly Hall.<sup>37</sup> On Friday, 20 March 1891, 100 matchbox makers sat down to tea at 166 Bethnal Green Road to again listen to the League's Miss Abraham on the merits of unionization.<sup>38</sup> At the very least, the workers had tea and perhaps consolidated their materialist agency with each other. These interclass intersections did not necessarily signify meaningful connections.

In 1888, the League also encouraged women cigar makers to unionize in response to their employer's threat to reduce their wages. Initially, the cigar makers 'failed to comprehend the meaning of the suggested union', but then 'no less than 300 women' gave their names. Upon determining that a fair wage for a 'competent girl' was 20s or 22s a week, they established a union, with cigar maker, Miss Goode, as secretary.<sup>39</sup> They too met at Lockhart's, now a coffee room.<sup>40</sup> In 1890, the League assisted the Mutual Association of Cigar Makers to form the London Society of

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<sup>35</sup> WTUL *Report* (1891); "Directory of Women's Trades Unions: London Unions," *Women's Trade Union Review* 10 (July 1 1893): 18; Sarah Wise, *The blackest streets: the life and death of a Victorian slum* (London: Vintage, 2009), 133-4.

<sup>36</sup> "A match box makers' union," *Women's Union Journal* (1889): 92-93; Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 119-120.

<sup>37</sup> *Reynolds Newspaper*, Sunday December 14 1890; *The Women's Penny Paper*, December 20 1890.

<sup>38</sup> *Reynolds Newspaper*, Sunday March 1891.

<sup>39</sup> "Trade unions and women," *The Evening Telegraph* (London, England), January 7 1890; "London notes," *The North Eastern Daily Gazette* (Middlesbrough), January 4 1890.

<sup>40</sup> *Women's Union Journal*, 166.

Female Cigar Makers. The union was still in existence in 1893 with a Mrs Stanmore as its Secretary.<sup>41</sup> A few years later, it amalgamated with the men's organization.<sup>42</sup> Barbara Hutchins believed that cigar making had become a woman's trade, because women came in 'not for doing more, but for asking less'.<sup>43</sup> She concluded that in London the best work was reserved for men because women were not as 'valuable' in the trade and 'do not stay'. Hutchins believed that men only amalgamated with women to raise the wage scale and drive women out of the trade, but women workers continued to 'undersell men' as their work set the union's wage standard.<sup>44</sup> Only a minority of women were skilled cigar makers, and all continued to be paid less than men.

The League's Miss Witham formed an Umbrella Makers Union. Once again, workers' irregular hours and isolation in small factories and homes undermined the union's strength. It was dissolved rather than it be thought inefficient.<sup>45</sup> Eleanor Aveling encouraged 400 female onion skimmers at the Crosse & Blackwell factory in East Ham to unionize. Their daily wage of 1d saw women forced to strike. Only when the company failed to meet its orders did it agree to new working conditions.<sup>46</sup> In 1891, the League tried to unionize rag sorters.<sup>47</sup> Stalwart League supporter, H. W. Hobart noted that, if workers did not combine, a trade union was merely a benefit society and a 'union of trades' was not a trade union.<sup>48</sup> Clementina Black renamed the League, the Women's Trade Union and Provident League. It invited bona fide trade unions inclusive of women to affiliate to the League for ½d. a year per female

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<sup>41</sup> "Directory of Women's Trades Unions: London Unions," *Women's Trade Union Review* 10 (July 1 1893): 18.

<sup>42</sup> *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (Middlesbrough), Saturday January 4 1890; Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920), 38; Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*. 38.

<sup>44</sup> B. L. Hutchins and J. J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* (London: Bell, 1915), 117-18.

<sup>45</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1890-91*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>46</sup> Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 319-323, 329-330.

<sup>47</sup> Women's Trade Union League, *Quarterly report and review* 1, no. 2 (1891).

<sup>48</sup> H. W. Hobart, "Trade Unions or benefit societies?," *Justice* 280 (Saturday May 25 1889).

member. In return, the League would send a female organizer.<sup>49</sup> Black was inundated with requests for organizers. The League invited prominent male trade union officials to participate on a Committee of Council to advise women on matters of trade union policy.<sup>50</sup>

When *WUJ*'s editor died in October 1889, the journal became the quarterly *Women's Trade Union Review (WTUR)*.<sup>51</sup> The League joined discussions on reducing the working day to eight hours, reported on working conditions, tried to overcome male prejudice to women workers and worked with local trade councils. The London Trade Council (LTC) had hitherto shunned the unskilled worker, but in the light of the industrial militancy it too recognized the opportunity to demonstrate its capacity for cordial arbitration. In 1890, it admitted female delegates for the first time.<sup>52</sup> In 1891, the League further clarified its stance and renamed itself the Women's Trade Union League. However, as union militancy erupted, the Society of Upholsterers struggled to survive. Eleanor Mears reported the trade's downturn and that mechanization and fear of strikes had diminished the union to 38 members. Mears found that 'younger women had no interest in unions'. Perhaps they had seen too much starvation and hardship.<sup>53</sup>

### **Women's Trade Union Association (WTUA)**

In 1889, Mrs Sheldon Amos, recognizing working women's agency, called a small meeting of friends, including Clementina Black, Amie Hicks and Clara James. They formed the Women's Trade Union Association. The Association specifically unionized East London's women workers.<sup>54</sup> Clementina Black left the League and

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<sup>49</sup> Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918," PhD, (University of Sussex, 1995), 43.

<sup>50</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918," 43.

<sup>52</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history* (London: Continuum, 2011), 138.

<sup>53</sup> "The Labour Commission," *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2 1891, 8; "The Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891.

<sup>54</sup> London, L.S.E, *WTUA Annual report, 1889-90*, 3-4. WIC/B/1.

was replaced by Emilia Holyoake. Many, like Frances Hicks, were active in both the League and the Association, until, in 1895, the League passed a resolution that nobody should belong to both organizations.<sup>55</sup> Like the League, the Association relied upon middle- and upper-class philanthropy or, as dockers' trade unionist, Ben Tillett, stated 'Lady Bountifuls'.<sup>56</sup> Such class associations did not compromise Amie Hicks' politics when she stated 'many imagine the poor can be richer without the rich being made poorer, but there is no such social miracle. Class war is a fact'.<sup>57</sup> Hicks also clarified that the wealthy become philanthropists when their unfairly acquired wealth is put at risk as they organize against socialism that would abolish the present system.<sup>58</sup> Like the League, the Association executive did not support strike funds. Its funds covered office costs, propaganda and protection of dismissed members only.<sup>59</sup>

Between 1,500 and 2,000 attended the Association's first meeting on Tuesday, 8 October 1889, at the Great Assembly Hall, Mile End. The Bishop of Bedford presided, and the Rev. Price Hughes called 'on all good citizens to give their moral and material support to working women who take this first step to improve their condition'. Mr John Burns called the resolution 'that the working women present at this meeting pledge themselves to support each other in the effort to obtain shorter hours of work, better payment and better conditions and their names given to the committee to become members of their trade'. Clementina Black and Mr Cooper of the LTC seconded the move.<sup>60</sup> Mr Charrington of the Great Assembly Hall provided the Association with a permanent registration and information desk in its vestibule. Toynbee Hall provided the Association with meeting space until it found an office at 128 Mile End Road.

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<sup>55</sup> Frances E. Willard, "Questions of the day," *The Woman's Signal* (London, England), Thursday August 29 1895.

<sup>56</sup> "Women's Trade Union Review, October 1896," in Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), 62.

<sup>57</sup> Amie Hicks, "Women and Socialism (from a working woman's point of view)," *Justice*, (April 25 1885).

<sup>58</sup> "Women's Trade Union Review October 1896," in Gerry Holloway, *A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1889-1890*, 3-4. WIC/B/1.

<sup>60</sup> "A labour organisation for women," *Justice* (June 21 1889); *Women's Union Journal* (Tuesday October 8 1889).

Initially, the Association held general meetings for working women every Tuesday evening in various districts. It was then decided to organize meetings by trades. LTC members joined the Association's committee, which lobbied for MPs and male trade unionists' cooperation.<sup>61</sup> Despite the existence of the League's box makers union, male trade unionists requested the Association to help organize women fancy box makers. A meeting was organized on 19 March 1890 at Lloyd United Friend's Hall, Banner Street, E.C. Despite the women box makers' low attendance due to 'their late working hours', a union was formed by its 'admirable and business-like members'. The Association decided that, given Clara James' experience of the trade, she should organize the numerous box makers. Despite the positive start, James soon found it 'futile' as 'the girls were too afraid to join a union' and the Association thought Clara James' time could be better spent.<sup>62</sup>

### **East London Confectioners' Union**

Given that confectionery workers had previously resorted to striking and that James had worked in the confectionery trade from 1885 to 1887, the Association decided that she should organize the confectioners.<sup>63</sup> Despite the dismissal of several confectioners who had been inquiry witnesses and union collectors, many men and women approached her to join the union.<sup>64</sup> The first union combined men and women, but as its membership diminished it was dissolved.<sup>65</sup> James became a familiar figure handing out handbills stating union objectives. On Thursday, 10 July

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<sup>61</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1889-1890*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>62</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1893-1894*, 3. WIC/B/1.

<sup>63</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual reports, 1889-90, 1890-91*. WIC/B/1; Clementina Black, "The chocolate-makers' strike," *Fortnightly Review* (August 1890): 306; Norbert C. Seldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978). 32.

<sup>64</sup> "Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891; "The Labour Commission," *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2 1891; London, London Metropolitan University, TUC, Gertrude Tuckwell Archive, The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," March (1892), 19/1, 19/9.

<sup>65</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1893-4*, 3. WIC/B/1.

1890, 12 female employees of Messrs Allen's Emmot Street confectionery factory approached James to discuss a petty workplace incident. They informed her that, when they had laughed at a woman who had slipped over, the forewoman fined the woman for causing a disturbance. The woman then indignantly responded 'Then I shan't pay my hospital penny'.<sup>66</sup> The following morning and evening James returned to their factory gates to distribute handbills. It was during the evening when James found a large group of workers outside the factory who said they were 'out' and 'What should they do?' James offered them the Association's office on Mile End Road as a meeting space.<sup>67</sup>

James rushed into the Association's office stating that the 'Allen girls are out on strike – and they are here!' The women spilled out of the office into Assembly-Passage. After James and Clementina Black had explained how the Association could help them, Black told them that they had a 'duty of orderly behaviour'.<sup>68</sup> The six women who had initiated the mass walkout explained that in the morning the woman had been told to pay a half crown fine, or she would be dismissed. So, they had refused to work until she was reinstated without a fine. At 5 p.m., the factory owner, Mr Allen, asked them why they had stopped working. Upon hearing their reason, he 'locked them out'. The Association advised the girls to collect their wages, but that the fined woman was not to accept a wage with a fine deduction.

James became the General Secretary for the East London Confectioners' Union. At their first union meeting on Saturday, 12 July at the Mile End Liberal and Radical Club, Globe Road, only Allen's women employees were admitted. John Burns attended in an advisory capacity. The confectioners formed a union committee and, at 8 a.m. on the following Monday, they picketed the factory gate. Black noticed the women's anxiousness, but Burn's support galvanized, not just them, but the whole East End. A wife of a Dockers' Union member offered a committee room in her home in Skidmore Street. Mr Allen, upon meeting the union committee, refused to arbitrate. Immediately the committee initiated a strike fund. The following day, food

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<sup>66</sup> Clementina Black, "The chocolate-makers' strike," *Fortnightly Review* (August 1890): 305-314 (306).

<sup>67</sup> Black, "The chocolate-makers' strike," (306).

<sup>68</sup> Black, "The chocolate-makers' strike," (306).

and tea tickets were issued to the striking women. Workers from Allen's Canal Road and Copperfield Road factories joined the crowds.

By Tuesday, they too wished to strike. Burns told them that they would be called out if it became necessary. Handbills of demands were disseminated. Crowds followed Burns as he walked through the East End to listen to him speak at two open-air meetings. Letters of support and strike fund contributions came from across London. Women's weekly strike pay of between 3s and 6s steadied their resolve.<sup>69</sup> Mr Allen agreed to better conditions without deductions, except for lateness fines, and he promised that union members would not be victimized or fined. Black concluded that the strike's victory lay with the 'admirable behaviour of the girls' as well as Mr Burns, Miss Simmons and Clara James. *Justice* thought the strike 'much cry, but little wool' and that Burns and Black naïve as these wins would be circumvented.<sup>70</sup> James continued to represent the trade. Company by company, she organized their workers.

On 22 November 1890, there was a meeting of confectionery and fruit preservers employed at Messrs Batger and Molr at The Orchard, Cranbrook Street, Ratcliffe. The Chair, Mr T. A. Mead, urged all to unionize to gain better conditions, increased wages and reduced hours. Mr George Bateman of the London Society of Compositors noted that, of the 400 male and female workers, only a few had become union members. He stated that 'unless they help themselves, they could not expect the unionists to help them'.<sup>71</sup> In the same year, 1890, confectioners and fruit preservers attended a 'labour movement' of 50,000 in London.<sup>72</sup> Clara represented the Confectioners Union at the LTC.<sup>73</sup> She advocated the need for female inspectors

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<sup>69</sup> Black, "The chocolate-makers' strike," 307; "London Labour Movements: Confectioners' Union," *Reynold's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday November 27 1890.

<sup>70</sup> "Chocolate girls," *Justice* (November 1890).

<sup>71</sup> "London Labour Movements: meeting of confectioners and fruit preservers," *Reynold's Newspaper*, November 23 1890.

<sup>72</sup> "London Labour Movements: meeting of confectioners and fruit preservers," *Reynold's Newspaper*, November 23 1890; "London Labour Movement: trade unionists and co-operation," *Reynold's Newspaper*, November 23 1890.

<sup>73</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1891-1892*. WIC/B/1.

and revealed how some companies forced workers to belong to a sick fund at 3 ½ d per week.<sup>74</sup> Resentment of the sick fund deduction became a political issue. In 1891 confectionary worker Louisa Hewlett, a spinster of 10 Flint Street, Poplar took Allen & Sons to court under the Truck Act 1887 to claim back the amount deducted whilst employed between 1886 and the week before Christmas 1891. The Act specified that an employer could not deduct from wages except in certain circumstances. On dismissal Louisa received a 3s bonus from the club, but she lost all her weekly deductions of 2 ½ and 3d. Hewlett argued she had not benefited from the fund as she had not been sick. In 1892 the Judge ruled that Allen & Sons should repay contributions to Hewlett but advised the company that it could appeal. In April 1894 Allen & Sons won their appeal.<sup>75</sup>

By 1895, as the trade was becoming reliant upon the sweating of young girls, workers turned to the Confectioners Union which was rapidly adding branches and had a membership of 800. As Clara James was unionizing confectionery workers Amie Hicks was unionizing women ropemakers.

## **Ropemakers Union**

When Amie saw the ropemakers' bandaged hands it had resonated with her personal experience of the trade. She had heard of the terrible reports of workers' exploitation and starvation.<sup>76</sup> On 1 November 1889, Amie Hicks and Clementina Black went to the factory gates of roperies to coincide with women workers as they finished their shifts. Although initially many were too afraid to attend a meeting, Hicks and Black persuaded 'twenty or thirty women' to come together to a meeting at Mission Room, Dean Street, Commercial Road.<sup>77</sup> The women 'showed themselves very earnest' in establishing a Ropemakers Union and elected Amie as Secretary.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>L.S.E. Women's Trade Union Association 1<sup>ST</sup> Report 1889 p.4, WIC/B/1

<sup>75</sup> L.S.E. Lousia Hewlett versus F. Allen & Sons 1904, WIC/A/5

<sup>76</sup> "The champion of Women's Trade Unions: interview," *The Women's Herald* (London, England) 1 (1893).

<sup>77</sup> B. Hutchins and J.J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* ([S.l.]: Bell, 1915), 128.

<sup>78</sup> Women's Trade Union, *Annual report, 1889*, 5; *Ropemakers Trade Union minute book*. 627/2/1 28/01.

Regular meetings were held in a side room of the Assembly Hall.<sup>79</sup> Men also applied to join the union. A total of 410 women and 280 men initially enrolled on equal terms. However, after a time, as with the Confectioners Union, it was found that it was better to divide the union into men and women's branches each with its own executive of five members.<sup>80</sup> Although the likes of Herbert Champion, Miss Balgarnie of the Women's Liberal Federation and Clementina Black occasionally attended, women workers mostly ran their meetings.

The first case the ropemakers discussed was that of a woman who had become ill through starvation. Initially, union subs were paid to the unemployed, but then, in July 1890, Henry Cradley proposed that union 'funds ought to be kept for strike pay, so as to win their battle'.<sup>81</sup> On 24 September 1890, the Ropemakers' Union organized meetings at St Mary's School in Johnston and Cable Streets. Mr Tom Mann presided and said, 'Great changes are coming in the future, not only for women, but for the whole of the workers in the world'.<sup>82</sup> One of the largest factories was that of Messrs Frost. Its women workers had the reputation of being some of the roughest in the East End but when they attended a union meeting Hicks found them 'most encouraging with their power of discipline, self-control and quiet determination'. Their contribution to the Ropemakers Union was such that Hicks found the union 'in many respects the more encouraging of all that we have founded' as the 'intelligence, fairness, and business capacity of its members being really favourable'.<sup>83</sup>

After a year of 'steady work and careful inquiry' into prices, the Union demanded that Messrs Frost increase the ropemakers' wage by 2d per hour.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Coventry, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, *East London Ropemakers' Trade Union, Minute book, 1890-1895*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>80</sup> *East London Ropemakers' Trade Union minute book*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>81</sup> *East London Ropemakers' Trade Union minute book*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>82</sup> "The labour agitation," *The Standard* (London, England), Thursday September 25 1890.

<sup>83</sup> "The champion of Women's Trade Unions: interview," *The Women's Herald* (London, England) 1 (1893).

<sup>84</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report and balance sheet, 1890-1891*. WIC/B/1; Coventry, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, *East London Ropemakers Trade Union, Correspondence relating to the strike*

When the demand was refused the Ropemakers struck for 11 weeks.<sup>85</sup> The striking women themselves contributed £1 8s 1d. Donations were sent to these 'gallant women' from many supporters, including an 'Irish conservative', gas workers and London saddle and harness makers.<sup>86</sup> Dockers sent a £10 cheque, cabinet makers donated £1, and £3 19s 5½d was collected at the Association's first annual meeting at the Assembly Hall.<sup>87</sup> When Messrs Frost offered the ropemakers 7d per week, but with an increase from 54 to 56½ weekly hours, the Ropemakers Union rejected the offer.<sup>88</sup> However, the London Trade Council arbitrated a successful compromise and the women went back to work.<sup>89</sup> Women workers' confidence had increased. When issues arose, the Ropemakers Union would summon Mr Frost and renegotiate working conditions. At one such meeting, when Frost agreed that women did not have to oil machines or work longer than 54 hours a week, the women cheered as he left.<sup>90</sup> Frost must have recognized that he did not have the control he once had.

In 1891, Hicks informed the Labour Commission that the numbers of Ropemaker Union members remained relatively low at 260. The fear of dismissal still existed. As the women ropemakers had no time to attend the Commission, Hicks stated that she would speak for them and of their working conditions as she had been a ropemaker and was a 'wife of a working man and mother of workers'.<sup>91</sup> Match maker unionist, Sarah Chapman, was still impacting upon the selfhood and agency of women in East London. In 1892, ropemakers listened to her speak of the match

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at Frost Brothers, "letters," 1890-1891, 627/2/1-11; London, Bishopsgate, Frost Brothers Ltd, *Rope makers and yarn spinners*, 1906.

<sup>85</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1890-1891*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>86</sup> *East London Ropemakers minute book*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>87</sup> "London Labour Movements," Reynolds Newspaper (London, England), November 23 1890.

<sup>88</sup> "London Labour Movements," Reynolds Newspaper (London, England), November 23 1890.

<sup>89</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1890-1891*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>90</sup> *East London Ropemakers Trade Union minute book*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>91</sup> "Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891; London Metropolitan University, TUC Gertrude Tuckwell Archive, Press cuttings 8, 19/1, 19/9 The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," (March 1892); "The Labour Commission," *The Morning Post* (London, England), Wednesday December 2 1891 .

makers' experience.<sup>92</sup> In 1893, the Ropemakers Union formed a club in its name.<sup>93</sup> Like the League, the Association organized excursions. The Ropemakers Union and other workwomen spent a day at Reigate Priory, where '800 strong' had a picnic and listened to Lady Henry Somerset and the Catholic Total Abstinence Society.<sup>94</sup> This in itself indicates that many were probably Irish. The Ropemakers Union worked well until 1894.<sup>95</sup>

As confectioners and ropemakers' mobilized, other trades unionized. Skilled mantle makers, many of whom were homeworkers, formed a union with Wynford Philips as Secretary.<sup>96</sup> When women brush makers held their first meeting on 29 July 1890 they had 'already prevented a strike and restored amicable relations in one factory. The master of their factory has testified, unasked, to the great improvement in punctuality brought about by the influence of the union'. However, in 1891, the union was dissolved on the women's demand.<sup>97</sup> Three hat and cap makers asked the Association to organize a meeting for them, but those who came were too timid to join.

As trade union militancy raged, the 1890 TUC refused "Lady Bountifuls" entry, stating delegates must be workers. Eleanor Aveling, Edith Simcox and Annie Besant found themselves excluded. Aveling complained that Clementina Black and Lady Dilke, who had 'never done a day's manual labour' were not excluded and that she herself was not a skilled worker.<sup>98</sup> However, in 1891, approximately 650 delegates represented 1.5 million workers at the Newcastle TUC. Among these delegates were Elizabeth Mears, Eleanor Whyte, Amie Hicks and Clara James.<sup>99</sup> Hicks and Whyte

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<sup>92</sup> Coventry, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, *East London Ropemakers' Trade Union, Minute book, 1890-1895*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>93</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual reports, 1892-93, 1993-4*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>94</sup> "The Rope Makers, headed by Mrs Amie Hicks," *The Woman Signal* (London, England) 84 (Thursday August 8 1895).

<sup>95</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual reports, 1892-93, 1993-4*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>96</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1890-91*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>97</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1890-91*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>98</sup> Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a life*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 339.

<sup>99</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report, 1890-91*. WIC/B/1.

both highlighted women workers' hardships and called for male and female workers to unite. Hicks highlighted the TUC's lack of trade union support for women workers. She informed the TUC that she had found in women workers 'a capacity for self-government, business management and orderly concerted action...and that there is 'no lack of ability, but only a lack of training'.<sup>100</sup> At a side meeting, Mears hoped that philanthropists would pay fair prices to businesses that paid fair wages and opined that the legal shortening of work hours had pushed wages up. In contrast, Florence Routledge stated that women should not have to 'go outside and work'.<sup>101</sup>

Writing in *Justice*, Herbert Burrows noted that new trade unionism had been gathering over the last 10 years, and that it 'was in everyone's mouth and glibly repeated'. He noted that its catalyst lay in the sweated conditions which forced workers to manifest

...their spirit of revolt against the existing social order, the consciousness that had no real freedom is possible under present conditions, the conviction that only by the workers' unity could their victory be gained, and that only by the combination of labour could the force and power of capitalism be rightly met.<sup>102</sup>

Even Lady Dilke was publicly noting the difference between a serious trade union and a friendly society or "club" patronized by a well-meaning philanthropist. She advised amateur trade unionists to seek guidance from the Trades Council.<sup>103</sup> Even though the Society of Bookbinders was still providing sick benefits in the more militant times of 1892, workers opined that it was an ineffective benefit society as 'you get nothing from it'.<sup>104</sup> This new generation was unaware of how individuals like Eleanor Whyte had galvanized isolated and fearful women workers during the 1870s

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<sup>100</sup> London, L.S.E., *WTUA Annual report and balance sheet, 1890-1891*. WIC/B/1.

<sup>101</sup> "Women in trade unionism: meeting at the Rye Hill Chapel," *The Newcastle Courant*, Saturday September 12 1891, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Herbert Burrows, "The new trade unionism," *Justice* (Saturday 25 Oct 1890).

<sup>103</sup> Florence Routledge "Trades unionism among women," *Fortnightly Review* 49, no. 293 (May 1891): 745-746.

<sup>104</sup> Ramsey MacDonald, *Women in the printing trades: a sociological study*, (London: P. S. King & Son, 1904) 38-42.

and 1880s. Although now a fragile woman, she had played an important role in laying the foundations of the 1890s' working-class women's labour movement.

East London's women trade union secretaries were called to give evidence at the 1891 Labour Commission. They reported that their members' wages were still those of 1865, with many earning 7s 6d. Only a fortunate minority earned 17s 4d.<sup>105</sup> Amie Hicks stated 'the condition of the women was so bad in East London that an employer had only to say he wanted some work done, fix his own rate of pay, and *he* would always find women glad to take it'.<sup>106</sup> What was needed was for 'women to combine and stand together, but owing to their poverty and dread of dismissal this was precisely what was most difficult for them to do'. This difficulty had been used to dub them 'docile', but was proved wrong with their constant disputes, strikes and militant spirit.<sup>107</sup> It was in this context that Jewish women workers had been mobilizing.

### **Mobilization of Jewish garment makers**

In 1888, the largely Jewish London Tailors and Machinists Society appealed for an 8-hour day. Millie Sabel and Rose Robins joined the German Anarchist Rudolf Rocker's Berners' Street Club, which fomented strikes among East End Jewish workers.<sup>108</sup> Jewish women participated in neighbourhood protests, campaigned for equality and for national women's suffrage.<sup>109</sup> Guillaume-Schaack was still organizing the Women's Union's meetings and had canvassed and distributed

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<sup>105</sup> The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," (March 1892), 19/1, 19/9 Gertrude Tuckwell Archive, TUC, London Metropolitan University.

<sup>106</sup> "Women witnesses at the Labour Commission: the women workers of the East End," *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 2 1891; B. Hutchins and J. J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* ([S.I.]: Bell, 1915), 130.

<sup>107</sup> Hutchins and Mallon, *Women in modern industry* 130; Frances Hicks, 'Factory Girls.' In *The New Party*, edited by Andrew Reid. ([s.l]: [s.n.], 1895), 222.

<sup>108</sup> *Daily News* (London, England), Monday April 28 1890; Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939* (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995), 106.

<sup>109</sup> Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman's cause: the Jewish woman's movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 114.

thousands of manifestoes.<sup>110</sup> In December 1890, 2,800 men and women of different nationalities attended a meeting at the Assembly Hall where they heard Eleanor Aveling recognize the anti-Semitism in national and international Socialism. She encouraged them to amalgamate into a Federation of East London Labour Unions.<sup>111</sup> Jewish workers were part of the 'great army' of wage-earners at the Hyde Park Labour Demonstration in 1890 in which the 'East had destroyed the myth that they had no solidarity'.<sup>112</sup>

The Barnetts of Toynbee Hall were still supporting Jewish women's union mobilization while Frances Hicks helped reform the League's London Tailoresses Trade Union (LTTU) along with Louisa Harrington, Alice Clamp, Lucy Horne, Sarah Thomas, Elizabeth Sullivan, Fanny Forester and Emma Elphick. Hicks became the LTTU's secretary. Over several meetings they helped tailoresses in Finsbury Park form an East End branch at Great Eastern Street, E.C. It appointed a president, secretary, treasurer and committee and gained between 20 and 30 members. Tailoresses at Old Ford and Bow then approached the LTTU for support. Its LTTU organizers, Misses Harrington and Clamp, found that they required industrial training and that 'the response of the women is encouraging and there is a need for more organisers'.<sup>113</sup> In 1892, the largely Jewish United Ladies Tailors and Mantle Makers Trade Union formed.<sup>114</sup> By describing themselves as 'Ladies' perhaps they were highlighting that they considered themselves respectable middle class workers, or that they hoped that civil society might be more likely to listen to them. Its LTTU organisers, Misses Wilson and Elizabeth Sullivan, after visiting the branch several

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<sup>110</sup> "The Women's Union," *Justice* 7, no. 315 (Saturday March 15 1890).

<sup>111</sup> "A new labour movement: meeting at the Assembly Hall." *The Commonwealth* (January 1890); Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 354; John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: a history of East London* (New Haven, C.T.; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 240.

<sup>112</sup> "The Hyde Park labour demonstration," *Daily News* (London, England), Monday April 28 1890; Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history*, (London: Continuum, 2011), 159.

<sup>113</sup> London, L.S.E., *WIC Annual report, 1894*. WIC/D.

<sup>114</sup> Kersten, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, 143.

times, reported to the London Tailoresses Union a 'very good account of the way in which these Jewesses understand organisation'.<sup>115</sup>

Lyon Selitrenny still believed that the Jewish tailoress 'dreads unions, they avoid strikes and she has slack times enough'.<sup>116</sup> In 1893, the LTTU formed a new East London Tailoresses Union (ELTU), but it also aligned itself to the militant, largely Jewish AST. Frances Hicks was its secretary and Irishwoman Marian Barry and Englishwoman Miss Stutely its organisers. They highlighted the increasingly ubiquitous exploitative government clothing contracts responsible for:

...thousands of women working themselves to death on clothing whose insufficient wages were 'paid for by public money collected in rates and taxes' to clothe soldiers, sailors, policemen, postmen, fire-brigade and others...Tailoresses of Finsbury, Aldgate and Whitechapel who desire better conditions of work and wages should attend and those who are satisfied to see women starving at our trade, some with too much and others not enough work had better stay away.<sup>117</sup>

At the meeting, Amie Hicks highlighted how factory owners quoted their low season profits and labelled women's 'deft and skillful' work as unskilled as justification of the low wages they paid. She also stated that the profits that underpinned the wealth of

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<sup>115</sup> London, L.S.E, (Flyer) "London Tailoresses' Trade Union: East End branch. A public meeting at Toynbee Hall...Monday 23rd July 1894." WIC/D; (Flyer) "London Tailoresses Trade Union: a general meeting of members Wednesday July 18th 1894 at the Tailors Club, 58 Wardour St, All tailoresses invited. Frances Hicks Secretary." Trade union correspondence 1895-1896, *WIC Annual report, 1894*. WIC/D.

<sup>116</sup> L. Selitrenny, "The Jewish working women in the East End," *Justice* 2, no. 9 (September 1898): 271-275; Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, 113-114.

<sup>117</sup> London, L.S.E, (Flyer) "London Tailoresses' Trade Union: East End branch. A public meeting at Toynbee Hall...Monday 23rd July 1894." WIC/D; (Flyer) "London Tailoresses Trade Union: a general meeting of members Wednesday July 18th 1894 at the Tailors Club, 58 Wardour St., All tailoresses invited. Frances Hicks Secretary." "Directory of Women's Trades Unions: London Unions," *Women's Trade Union Review* 10 (July 1 1893): 18.

the nation held in the Bank of England were in close proximity to the exploitative conditions in which they were created.<sup>118</sup>

In 1894, Frances Hicks led 3,000 working girls and women from the East End to Hyde Park to join yet another labour demonstration.<sup>119</sup> By this point, Frances had become an influential conduit of materialist agency as she published articles on working girls' enforced industrial slavery in the competitive labour market.<sup>120</sup> As this new ELTU grew, the original ELTU dissolved as its members struggled to afford its' subscription.<sup>121</sup> Other tailoresses formed a London Tailoresses Trade Union (LTTU) City branch.<sup>122</sup> Anti-Semitism had reached new levels. William Wilkins, who was Secretary to the Earl of Dunraven, extended Arnold White's 'Alien Invasion'.<sup>123</sup> In 1894, they founded the Association for the Prevention of the Immigration of Destitute Aliens and set up a well-ventilated workshop to provide a healthy workspace for homeworkers.<sup>124</sup> Not realizing that many homeworkers cared for children, it was left underused. Wilkins concluded 'poor women are the most difficult to help, in as much as they will not play up to help themselves'.<sup>125</sup>

In 1895, the TUC passed a resolution calling on the British government to control the immigration of "alien workers". In response, 10 Jewish unions called a mass 'Protest of Aliens' at the Great Assembly Hall. The United Ladies Tailors and

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<sup>118</sup> "The Champion of Women's Trade Unions: Interview," *The Women's Herald* (London, England) 1 (1893): 5.

<sup>119</sup> "Three thousand working girls and women marched..." *The Woman's Signal* (London, England) 13 (Thursday March 29 1894): 207.

<sup>120</sup> Frances Hicks, "A specimen factory girl," *The Girls Own Paper* 794 (Saturday March 16): 375.

<sup>121</sup> Women's Trade Union League, *Annual report, 1893*.

<sup>122</sup> London, L.S.E. "The Third annual report of the London Tailoresses Trade Union," *Women's Trade Union Association Annual Report* (July 31 1894). WIC/D.

<sup>123</sup> *William Henry Wilkins, The alien invasion* (with an introductory note by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Bedford) (London: Methuen & Company, 1892); *Arnold White, The problems of a great city* (London: Remington and Co., 1886).

<sup>124</sup> Rowbotham and Mitter, *Dignity and daily bread: new forms of economic organising among poor women in the Third World and the First* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 174.

<sup>125</sup> Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 100.

Mantle Makers Trade Union joined the 5,000 protesters.<sup>126</sup> Perhaps because of its vulnerability, the Jewish movement fractured. In 1896, *The Journeyman: a journal devoted to the interests of the workers in the clothing industry*, was published to mobilize Jewish tailors' agitation. In its first issue it printed a letter that opined:

...women did more than any alien to lower wages and bring down the condition of life. Given the 5 000,000 workers in this country, only a handful of Jews lower the standard of living.<sup>127</sup>

It was during radical moments that class prejudices cemented in. Pioneer of the Charity Organisation Society, Helen Bosanquet, did not recognize workers' militancy as agency. She stated in 1896 a 'great problem with this class is how to bring them to regard life as anything but a huge chaos'.<sup>128</sup> When Amie Hicks informed a Church Congress of the starvation and suicide rates of the poor, a clergyman was well applauded when he rebutted her with 'free labourers ought to be protected against the tyranny of trade unions'.<sup>129</sup> Despite clearly being "a worker and a mother of workers" and secretary to the Ropemakers Union, in 1895, the TUC also excluded Hicks because she had not worked in the ropemaking trade in England.<sup>130</sup> In 1896, Dilke continued to concur with trade unionist Ben Tillet's fear of married women workers. In 1897, she did not refute the London Trade Council's secretary, Mr Skipton, at a League meeting when he stated, 'It is not true that the men have been out of sympathy with the women during the last twenty-five years,

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<sup>126</sup> Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 356; "The protest of aliens: great meeting at Whitechapel", *Daily Chronicle*, Tuesday December 10 1895.

<sup>127</sup> *The Journeyman: a journal devoted to the interests of the workers in the clothing industry* 1, no. 1 (March 23 1896): 7-8.

<sup>128</sup> Jane Lewis, "The working class wife and mother and state intervention, 1870-1918," in *Labour and Love: women's experience of home and family, 1850-1940*, ed. Jane Lewis (Oxford; New York: B. Blackwell, 1986), 99.

<sup>129</sup> "Church Congress," *Daily News* (London, England), Friday October 7 1892.

<sup>130</sup> Sarah A. Tooley, "Labour problems and the L.C.C.: an interview with Mrs. Amie Hicks," *Woman's Signal: a weekly record and review devoted to the interests of women in the home and in the wider world* 61 (Thursday February 28 1895).

but women won't help themselves'.<sup>131</sup> Dilke had so reduced the League's TUC delegates that, nationally, women workers were represented by only 9 women out of 280 delegates.<sup>132</sup> Dilke had effectively not just kept women out of the trade union structures, she had reduced the potential number of women trade unionist mentors.<sup>133</sup> However, despite her stance, these nine women delegates represented 'over one million highly organised workers'.<sup>134</sup> Clementina Black stated at the Bradford Women's Trade Council that she had a feeling that 'men are moving towards combining in force with women workers' as the LTC was now helping working women to organize into unions.<sup>135</sup>

By 1894, the women's trade union movement was combining into one of three types of labour organization: an all-women's society, a combined trade union, or a general labour union, and the numbers of this latter type were increasing.<sup>136</sup> Both the League and the Association offered working-class women work and training opportunities. For example, Amie Hicks' daughter, Frances Hicks, was nominated by the LTC to oversee training courses on the Technical Education Board and Clara James became the Assistant Secretary of the Association.<sup>137</sup> Yet Beatrice and Sidney Webb's 1894 *History of Trade Unionism* omitted women's contribution to the wider movement.<sup>138</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette* stated: 'Out of a total of 682,000 women employed in all occupations in London trade unionism can only boast of a pitiful little

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<sup>131</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920), 39-40; Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977), 91; Women's Trade Union League, *Annual report and balance sheet 1897*.

<sup>132</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 41.

<sup>133</sup> Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918," PhD, (University of Sussex, 1995) 51.

<sup>134</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 41.

<sup>135</sup> "Public and social letters, no CLXII: to women wokers," *Reynolds Newspaper*, Sunday December 13 1891, 2.

<sup>136</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 41.

<sup>137</sup> Ellen Mappen, *Helping women at work: the Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914* (London: Hutchinson in association with The Explorations in Feminism Collective, 1985), 15.

<sup>138</sup> Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longman Green, 1894), in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (New York: New York University, 1995), 57.

total of 2,000 organised women within twelve unions'. Such statements do not acknowledge the chain of strikes and the subsequent unionization in the relatively small geography of East London. It ignored women workers' volition and resilience to overcome their constraints and manifest their agency in trade unions, meetings, demonstrations and industrial clubs.

It was not surprising that there were, as Margaret Bondfield noted, 'painfully few rebellious trade unionists compared with the vast army of women wage-earners'.<sup>139</sup> Tailoress and trade unionist, Isabella Ford, whose mother had been Emma Paterson's friend, noted how the stigma of being an assertive woman undermined rebellious trade unionism. She also noted that those who understand its worth grasp it 'religiously'.<sup>140</sup> While the Association unionised women workers, the cooperative movement had gained momentum. In 1890, the Socialist League's *Commonweal* had placed a call for a Laundry Women's cooperative.<sup>141</sup> By 1895 the likes of docker trade unionist, Ben Tillett, and the League's Miss May Abraham were advocating that all should become trade unionists and create worker cooperatives.<sup>142</sup>

### **Protective legislation**

The Employers Liability Act 1880 held employers responsible for injuries sustained through hazardous working conditions. The Fair Wages Resolution (FWR) 1891 and the Factory and Workshop Act developed a Board of Trade's role in arbitration and conciliation procedures and a Royal Commission of Labour. The labour movement endeavoured to close the loophole of seasonal exemptions under the Factory and Workshop Acts, which allowed the larger factory owners to avoid the imposition of shorter working days.<sup>143</sup> The Factory Act 1891 stated that women must not "knowingly" be employed for four weeks after giving birth and incorporated

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<sup>139</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 41.

<sup>140</sup> June Hannam, *Isabella Ford* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 31.

<sup>141</sup> *Commonweal*, (October 25 1890).

<sup>142</sup> "London Labour Movement: trade unionists and co-operation," *Commonweal: The Commonweal: the official journal of the Socialist League* December 1890.

<sup>143</sup> Gertrude Mary Tuckwell, *The State and its Children* ([London]: Methuen & Co., 1894), 161.

dangerous trade regulation.<sup>144</sup> However, lawyer, Eliza Orme, who became an Assistant Commissioner, stated that the act would force women to work in uninspected workshops and homes. Orme confirmed that 'factory gave shorter hours and better pay'.<sup>145</sup> May Abraham told the 1891 TUC that married women should be in the home and men should do all the work outside the home.<sup>146</sup>

In 1893, Beatrice Webb built support for protective legislation through the formation of the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW). The NUWW helped co-ordinate 'women's philanthropic organisations involved in issues around women and work, including trade unions. Its aim was to promote 'social, moral, and religious welfare of women in general'. Beatrice described the NUWW's members as those 'who form the undercurrent of public opinion, that in one's secular and revolutionary set one never comes across'. Approximately 600 middle-aged and well-to-do, 'hard working philanthropists and guardians of the poor' attended its conferences.<sup>147</sup>

By 1894, the Fabian Society, the NUWW, the League and the Association concurred that trade unionism alone was not sufficient to protect women workers, but that legislation had the potential to offer workers permanent protection. Notable political differences appeared in the calls for protective legislation. Beatrice Webb and the Fabian Society now deemed working-class children state property. They imposed the patriotic duty of motherhood and the responsibility of the future British race and empire upon working women.<sup>148</sup> The League's Secretary, Gertrude

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<sup>144</sup> Sarah Boston, *Women workers and the trade unions* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), 91.

<sup>145</sup> Ruth Livesey, "The Politics of Work: Feminism, Professionalisation and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004): 244.

<sup>146</sup> Jenny Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation*, (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Gower, 1986), 175.

<sup>147</sup> Serena Kelly, "A sisterhood of service: the records and early history of the National Union of Women Workers," *Journal of Society of Archivists* 14.2 (1993) 167-74, 167

<sup>148</sup> Carolyn Malone, *Women's bodies and dangerous trades in England, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 143; Carolyn Malone, "The gendering of dangerous trades: government regulation of women's work in the white lead trade in England, 1892-1898," *Journal of Women's History*, no. 1 (1996): 15-35 (29); Barbara Harrison, *Not only the 'dangerous trades': women's work and health in Britain, 1880-1914* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 237.

Tuckwell, advocated 'the gradual extension of labour protection to the point where mothers will be prohibited from working until their children have reached an age that they can care for themselves'.<sup>149</sup> They urged for an 'endowment of motherhood' to protect mothers from working.<sup>150</sup> The League, under the influence of Sir Charles Dilke, also sought to bring new classes of workers under the protection of the Factory and Workshop Acts.

The League hired Miss Mona Wilson, along with Gertrude Tuckwell and the Christian Social Union, to campaign on dangerous trades and the prevention of phossy jaw and lead poisoning.<sup>151</sup> Jewess Lily Montagu became a leader in the girls' club movement, and Miss Manyard set up the Bow Working Girls Club of 'dangerous trades'.<sup>152</sup> Amie Hicks argued 'instead of allowing a woman to be temporally displaced... agitate for alterations in the conditions of the unhealthy trades'.<sup>153</sup> She advocated that men and women both be protected equally with proper clothing.<sup>154</sup> Laundresses, of their own volition, campaigned to be included in the Factory Act 1891 to restrict their 16-hour working day without limiting their earning capacity.<sup>155</sup> The image in Figure 36 below illustrates the arduous and hazardous nature of laundry work.

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<sup>149</sup> Gertrude Mary Tuckwell, *The State and its Children* (1894), 161.

<sup>150</sup> Beilharz and Nyland, *The Webbs, Fabianism and feminism: Fabianism and the political economy of everyday life*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 54-56, 59.

<sup>151</sup> Women's Trade Union League, *Annual report and balance sheet 1897*, 46, 49; Carolyn Malone, "The gendering of dangerous trades: government regulation of women's work in the white lead trade in England, 1892-1898," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 1 (1996): 15-35.

<sup>152</sup> Women's Trade Union League, *Annual report and balance sheet, 1904*.

<sup>153</sup> Barbara Harrison, *Not only the 'dangerous trades': women's work and health in Britain, 1880-1914*. (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 209.

<sup>154</sup> The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators," *March* (1892), 19/1, 19/9 Gertrude Tuckwell Archive, TUC, London Metropolitan University.

<sup>155</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920), 27.



**Figure 36: Public Laundry, East London.** Engraving in *The Quiver* 1883

(Source: Mary Evans Picture Library)

When the League canvassed 67,500 laundresses, 66,000 voted in favour of extending the bill to laundries.<sup>156</sup> An Amalgamated Society of Laundresses was formed out of the remnants of earlier societies. Its 3,000 members formed its 8 branches in London and Brighton districts. The London Trade Council organized a giant demonstration to Hyde Park and the League organized another in Brighton. The TUC and Asquith supported the inclusion of laundries in the Factories and Workshops Act 1895. The Irish Party, in fear of an inspection into the convent laundries, withdrew its support. Its representative Mr Stuart Wortley ‘challenged the right of the house to interfere with the labour of an unenfranchised class’ and so the bill fell.<sup>157</sup>

Clara James, Amie Hicks, who also represented the World’s Christian Temperance Union, Miss Balgarnie of the Women’s Liberal Federation and Elizabeth Mears lobbied Asquith and the TUC’s Parliamentary Committee for female factory inspectors under the Factory and Workshop Acts 1878 and 1891.<sup>158</sup> In 1893,

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<sup>156</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 27.

<sup>157</sup> B. L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A history of factory legislation* (London: P.S. King and Son, 1911), 192; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 27-28.

<sup>158</sup> “Factory legislation,” *The Standard* (London, England), Wednesday January 25 1893, 2; “Inspection of factories and workshops: deputations to Mr Asquith,” *The Leeds Mercury*, Wednesday January 25 1893, 5; “Mr Asquith Receives a Monster Deputation: Men and Women Invaded His Home to Urge Him to Appoint Women

Elizabeth Mears, Clara James and Amie Hicks were part of a large deputation of 300 associations requesting working-class 'practical men' experienced in factories and workshops to be stationed in London to inspect workplaces.<sup>159</sup> Mears asked for a women commissioner because women workers would be 'marked' if they were seen talking to a male inspector.<sup>160</sup> Amie Hicks stated that current inspection was a 'farce' as the sanitary conditions of workplaces in London were a disgrace and advocated the registration and inspection of all workplaces and wages. However, she also noted that factory inspectors were never taken to the worst part of a factory and 'they never see the women's lavatories'.<sup>161</sup> Even anti-protective legislator, Eleanor Whyte, urged for female factory inspectors knowledgeable of the trade they were inspecting.<sup>162</sup>

The first woman factory inspector was employed in 1893. Amie Hicks also called for women officials in police stations, asylums and on school boards. She declared that women 'would no longer be any more content to be represented by men than working women were to be represented by their landlords'.<sup>163</sup> Hicks, James and Mears also joined in the mass support for the Employers Liability Bill 1894, which allowed employees to seek compensation from employers for injuries sustained in their employment. Frances Hicks declared that many non-unionized women working in hazardous trades were not represented and 'they specially needed the protection of this bill'.<sup>164</sup> The bill was overthrown by the House of Lords.

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Factory Inspectors and Additional Men Inspectors," *The Standard* (London, England), January 28 1893, 2; "Factory Legislation" *The Standard* (London, England), Wednesday January 25 1893, 2.

<sup>159</sup> "Upholstresses Society," *Women's Union Journal* 159 (Monday April 15 1889): 28; "Inspection of factories and workshops: deputation to Mr. Asquith," *The Leeds Mercury*, Wednesday January 25 1893, 5; "Factory Legislation," *The Standard* (London, England), Wednesday January 25 1893, 2.

<sup>160</sup> "The Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891; *The Morning Post*, Wednesday December, 8; *Women's Union Journal* 172 (May 15 1890): 39.

<sup>161</sup> The Confectioners' Union, "Our Labour Commission: further evidence of the leading employers in the confectionery trade continue to refute the assertions of the agitators" (March 1892), 19/1, 19/9 Gertrude Tuckwell Archive, TUC, London Metropolitan University.

<sup>162</sup> "Factory inspectors," *Western Daily Press*, Thursday September 4 1890, 8.

<sup>163</sup> "Women and London Reforms," *Shafts* 14 (February 4 1893): 217-8.

<sup>164</sup> Percy L. Parker, "The women in Hyde Park," *The Woman's Signal* (London, England) 13 (1894).

In outrage, workers demonstrated en masse in Hyde Park.<sup>165</sup> Women Ropemakers Union practised their message in their union meeting that rejected philanthropy, and demanded, 'Justice not charity, the right to live, hope for their children'. They shouted '80,000 who are the daughters and sisters of working men's wives,...over 30,000 have no home...43,000 children working...thousands of our working women demand a living rate of wage for a fair day's work and there will be no need for his rescue homes'.<sup>166</sup> Hicks clearly recognized women workers' industrial strength and agency when she stipulated, 'we women, not having any vote, can only say to those who will not help our cause, not only will we refuse to work for you, but we will work against you'.<sup>167</sup>

In 1894, Amie Hicks also demanded women's suffrage when she spoke on the Registration Bill at a mass meeting, which included 'all principal women's societies: suffrage, political, trade and temperance'.<sup>168</sup> The Liberal *Women's Herald* reported that Amie Hicks demanded workers' fair share of the profits and advocated that workers combine to achieve protective legislation.<sup>169</sup> Amie Hicks and Clementina Black called a Women's Labour Conference, in which they established the Women's Industrial Council (WIC) to investigate working conditions, to act as the 'poor woman's lawyer and to lobby for workers protective legislation'.<sup>170</sup> Amie Hicks had concluded that class legislation could only be overturned by legislation.<sup>171</sup> At the

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<sup>165</sup> *The Standard* (London, England), March 19 1894, 6.

<sup>166</sup> Coventry, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, *East London Ropemakers' Trade Union, Minute book, 1890-1895*. 627/2/1 28/01.

<sup>167</sup> "The Champion of Women's Trade Unions: an interview with Mrs. Amie Hicks," *The Women's Herald* (London, England) 1 (Thursday February 3 1893): 5.

<sup>168</sup> "Shall women have the vote?" *Reynolds Newspaper*, Monday June 11 1894, 3, "The Registration Bill," *The Yorkshire Herald and The York Herald*, Tuesday June 5 1894, 6.

<sup>169</sup> "The Champion of Women's Trade Unions: an interview with Mrs Amie Hicks," *The Women's Herald* (London, England) 1 (Thursday February 3 1893): 5.

<sup>170</sup> Ellen Mappen, "Helping women at work: the Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914" (London: Hutchinson in association with The Explorations in Feminism Collective, 1985), 20.

<sup>171</sup> Mappen, "Helping women at work : the Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914, 48-49; "Married women's work: being the report of an enquiry undertaken by the Women's Industrial Council, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. Clementina

1895 annual conference of the NUWW in Nottingham, Amie Hicks introduced the discussion on 'State regulation affecting women's work'.<sup>172</sup> In 1896, the Hon. Mrs A Lyttelton presided over a meeting that listened to Hicks read a paper on factory fines and deductions from women's wages. Hicks stated that women's lack of trade union training left women 'easy prey for the unscrupulous and thoughtless employers', and deductions and fines 'made all the difference between comparative comfort and hunger'.<sup>173</sup>

In 1896, the Department of Female Factory Inspectors was formed. The League followed their work and published their prosecutions in the *Women's Trade Union Review*. The League turned to sympathetic MPs, such as Sir Charles Dilke and H. J. Tennant (husband of May Tennant, née Abraham), to ask questions in the House of Commons on their behalf. The League referred cases to the Legal Advice Committee. In 1896, Frances Hicks became the Association's Secretary and, in 1897, the Association merged into WIC. At the 1897 TUC, Clementina Black exposed the horrors of sweated work. Amie Hicks argued for the shortening of working hours and protection of both men and women from hazardous working conditions alongside the abolition of child labour. Beatrice Webb agreed but recognized that male workers needed to protect their 'professional' wage from being undervalued by 'female amateurs'.<sup>174</sup> The League's Mrs Balgarnie called for the protection of men and women in retail, but not the restriction of women's working

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Black (London: Virago, 1915; 1983), ii; Amie Hicks, "The Factory Bill," *The Woman's Signal* (London, England), 76 (Thursday June 13 1895): 388.

<sup>172</sup>National Union of Women Workers, "Workers Official report of the annual meeting of the general committee of the National Union of Women Workers held at the Mechanics Hall, Nottingham October 25 1895" (London: National Union of Women Workers, 1895); "Meeting of women workers in Nottingham," *The Derby Mercury* (Derby), Wednesday October 30 1895;

<sup>173</sup> "Fines and deductions in women's wages," *The Woman's Signal* (London, England) 150 (1896): 6.

<sup>174</sup> Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One hand tied behind us: the rise of the women's suffrage movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Rivers Oram, 2000), 28-29; Peter Beilharz and Chris Nyland. *The Webbs, Fabianism and Feminism: Fabianism and the Political Economy of Everyday Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 12.

hours.<sup>175</sup> Middle-class SDF member, Annie Besant, argued that these protective legislation measures, for example, the Eight Hours Bill, and calls for fair wages were ‘palliatives lessening the acuteness of social disease’, not socialism.<sup>176</sup>

### **Anti-protective legislation campaigns**

The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW) and Millicent and Richard Fawcett galvanized against the pro protective legislation campaigns. They stated that such interventions undermined women’s access to the labour market and individual liberty. They asked whether the evils were greater under regulation or under free competition. In response, Beatrice Webb argued that working-class women had less power to obtain legislation than middle-class women had to obstruct it. The Fawcetts retorted that the working class had less power to obstruct middle-class legislation that constrained them.<sup>177</sup> In 1892, SPEW mobilized against the labelling of women’s work as hazardous through the initiative the Women’s Industrial Defence Committee (WIDC). For three years, it endeavoured to protect women’s jobs in the hazardous industries through its campaigns for safety measures in the workplace and worker protection. In 1893, Whyte lobbied the philanthropic Duchess of York whilst wishing her joy in her royal marriage and thanking her for her interest in women’s industries.<sup>178</sup> Whyte’s caution over the campaign for equal pay for equal work stemmed from the use of women workers’ segregation in the workplace to imply that women’s work was less skilled, or even unskilled, and that its lower remuneration would continue. If a woman was no longer

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<sup>175</sup> “Women’s Liberal Association,” *Essex County Standard, West Suffolk Gazette and Eastern Counties Advertiser* (Colchester), Saturday 14 April 1900, 7, accessed March 15 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>176</sup> Annie Besant, “The class war,” *Justice* (Saturday January 18 1890).

<sup>177</sup> Mrs Sidney Webb, *Women and the Factory Acts* (London: Fabian Society, 1896), 4; Peter Beilharz and Chris Nyland. *The Webbs, Fabianism and Feminism: Fabianism and the Political Economy of Everyday Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 67.

<sup>178</sup> “The Duchess of York and the workwomen,” *The Preston Guardian*, Saturday August 12 1893.

a cheaper worker, she could well be excluded from all employment.<sup>179</sup> Her fears were shared by Honnor Morten, who recognized that the campaign for equal pay for equal wages was being used to exclude women from employment opportunities.

Women were denigrated into:

...anaemic nerveless looking creatures, and how these cheap women workers are, you would surely recognise how enormous the human would benefit if in the matter of wages, all questions of sex were dismissed, and there only ruled the theory of equal pay for equal work. Then fewer women would work and those that did would be more efficient.<sup>180</sup>

In 1894, SPEW formed the Women's Employment Defence League (WEDL) to give working women a voice to campaign against protective legislation that 'only protected male workers' jobs'. Boucherett presided over the meeting, which drew up WEDL's rules. A branch was to be set up in Soho and another in Bethnal Green.<sup>181</sup> WIDC and WEDL, represented by Whyte, were part of a working women's deputation to the House of Commons to inform Mr Asquith that 'the whole factory legislation was based on treating women like children'.<sup>182</sup> At another deputation, government representative, Mr Russell, replied that 'the government did not wish to treat women as children, nor limit their freedom by unnecessary restrictions'.<sup>183</sup> At the 1894 TUC, Whyte was almost alone in questioning the new Factory Act. She demanded to know 'by which power was given to the Home Secretary to stop

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<sup>179</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* ([S.l.]: World Microfilms), 65; Karen Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 130.

<sup>180</sup> Honnor Morten, "Questions for women," *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, February 11 1899, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>181</sup> "Clubs for working women," *The Queen* (London, England), Saturday January 20 1894.

<sup>182</sup> "Women's Employment Defence League," *Morning Post*, Wednesday June 27 1894, 3; Carolyn Malone, "The gendering of dangerous trades: government regulation of women's work in the white lead trade in England, 1892-1898," (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>183</sup> "The Women's Employment Defence League," *Shafts: a magazine of progressive thought* 12, no. 4 (1896): 162-163.

women from working in unhealthy trades' when 'hazardous trades were just trades men thought women would interfere in'. Her motion was not seconded.<sup>184</sup>

WEDL initiated an information campaign in East London. In January 1895, it held a meeting in Columbia Market in Bethnal Green and later that evening another in Hackney. Mrs Fawcett presided and informed the meeting 'largely attended by women workers' that 'many people thought that everything crooked could be made straight by an Act of Parliament'.<sup>185</sup> Fawcett clarified that:

the objects of the [WEDL] are: (1) To claim for adult women equal freedom within the disposal of their labour. (2) to oppose all legislation likely to lessen women's earnings or deprive them of employment and that this meeting thinks that it should be left to a married working woman to judge for herself how soon after her birth of a child she should return to work. (3) That this league protests against any attempt to make it more difficult for a woman to obtain homework.<sup>186</sup>

Whyte then presented WEDL's report.<sup>187</sup> By June 1895, Whyte was WEDL's Soho branch's Secretary and hosted its meetings in her home.<sup>188</sup> As part of a reception party, dressed in 'Cadogan colours', she presented Lady Cadogan with a posy of lily of the valley flowers and daffodils. In her speech she asked if an organization could

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<sup>184</sup> Carolyn Malone, "The gendering of dangerous trades: government regulation of women's work in the white lead trade in England, 1892-1898," 2

<sup>185</sup> "WEDL meeting," *London Daily News*, Wednesday January 16 1895; "Mrs Fawcett presided..." *Morning Post*, Wednesday January 16 1895, 5; "A meeting at Women's Employment Defence League..." *Woman's Signal*, Thursday January 24 1895, 55, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>186</sup> "WEDL meeting," *London Daily News*, Wednesday January 16 1895; "Mrs Fawcett presided..." *Morning Post*, Wednesday January 16 1895, 5; "A meeting at Women's Employment Defence League..." *Woman's Signal*, Thursday January 24 1895, 55, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>187</sup> "WEDL meeting," *London Daily News*, Wednesday January 16 1895; "Mrs Fawcett presided..." *Morning Post*, Wednesday January 16 1895, 5; "A meeting at Women's Employment Defence League..." *Woman's Signal*, Thursday January 24 1895, 55, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>188</sup> "The New Factory Workshop Bill: Women's Employment Defence League," *Shafts* 3, no. 3 (June 1895): 38.

be called "The Cadogan Club". 'Lady Cadogan graciously accepted the bouquet and replied in kindly and courteous terms to Miss Whyte's speech'.<sup>189</sup>

As per Whyte's request, when WEDL members increased in number, it moved to the Cadogan Club for women workers, in Shoreditch, East London.<sup>190</sup> Lady Cadogan opened its first meeting at which Whyte reported its work. On another occasion it provided entertainment for 400 'friends of WEDL' in Bethnal Green.<sup>191</sup> At another meeting in Bethnal Green, WEDL repudiated the actions of the Miners International Congress prohibiting female labour.<sup>192</sup> Jersey and Boucherett clubs also opened for working women to express their political will.<sup>193</sup> The clubs provided a conduit for working women's voices who wished to oust the gender division of paid labour and demanded 'women's own choice of life'.<sup>194</sup> This view was taken up by the suffrage movement, who created propaganda emphasizing the lack of consultation on protective legislation with working women, as seen in Figure 37 below.

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<sup>189</sup> "On the evening of Wednesday," *Gentlewomen*, Saturday February 10 1894.

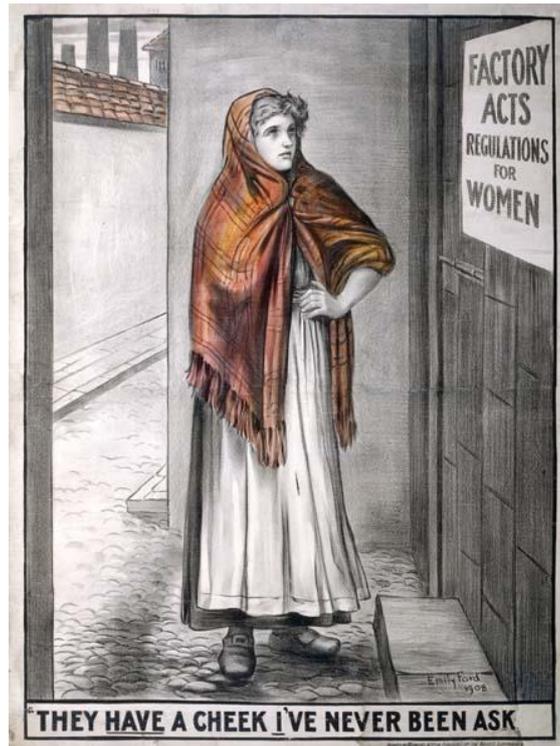
<sup>190</sup> "The Women's Employment Defence League," *Northern Whig*, Thursday November 15 1894; "Who's Who," *The Evening News and Post* (London, England), Thursday December 1 1894, 2; "Court Circular," *London Daily News*, Saturday February 10 1894, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>191</sup> "400 tailoresses, boot machinists, box makers, members and friends of...St. Thomas's School," *London Daily News*, Thursday January 16 1896.

<sup>192</sup> "Pit Brow Girls," *Fife Press & Kirkcaldy Guardian*, Saturday June 27 1896, 3, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>193</sup> "The Women's Employment Defence League," *Shafts: a magazine of progressive thought*, 4 (1896).

<sup>194</sup> "The Women's Employment Defence League," *Shafts: a magazine of progressive thought* 12, no. 4 (1896): 162-163.



**Figure 37: Anti-Factory Acts propaganda, 1908.** Designed by Emily Ford and published by the Artists' Suffrage League

(Source: Museum of London)

Given that many workshops were workers' homes, there was a movement against registration and inspection of workshops. In 1896, the Society of Women Employed in Tailoring, Bootmaking and Allied Trades took issue with the Factory Acts, which allowed male inspectors to 'claim entrance' to their homes.<sup>195</sup> In 1897, WEDL became the Freedom of Labour Defence Association (FOLD) to protect women 'from the imposition of legal restrictions that would diminish their wage-earning capacity, limit their personal freedom and inconvenience them in their work'.<sup>196</sup> In 1899, FOLD investigated the white lead industry to prove that protective measures in the workplace kept working women safe. FOLD existed until 1913.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> "The Women's Employment Defence League," *Woman's Signal*, Thursday January 16 1896.

<sup>196</sup> Carolyn Malone, *Women's bodies and dangerous trades in England, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 121;

<sup>197</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), 8; Anne Bridger, "A century of women's employment in clerical occupations: 1850-1950, with particular reference to the role of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women," PhD, (University of Gloucestershire, 2003),

Although Fabian Barbara Hutchins also demanded 'conditions of industry that fit women rather than to drive them out', she found WIDC and WEDL's narrow anti-protective legislation views 'backwardness'. Hutchins argued that their non-participation in the 8-hour agitation between 1891 to 1894 antagonized men, causing considerable ill-feeling and resentment.<sup>198</sup> She described their equal rights stance as the 'right wing of the women's rights movement'.<sup>199</sup> Historian Barbara Harrison notes that Hutchins' views compromised feminism.<sup>200</sup> Amie Hicks and Clementina Black often spoke on the same platforms as Whyte, but Hicks directed her irritation of the anti-protective legislation stance towards the powerful representative of civil society: Jessie Boucherett.<sup>201</sup>

After the Association folded into WIC in 1897, Amie Hicks took on WIC's education remit of informing workers of the social questions, economics and legislation that affected their trade. Clara James became WIC's drill instructor and was responsible for the Physical Drill for Working Girls and organized annual displays at the Queen's Hall. James encouraged a broader understanding of health issues, such as physical exercise and rational dress.<sup>202</sup> Mary Neal initiated the Clubs Industrial Association, which arranged industrial lectures, social meetings and special citizenship classes for girls' clubs. It eventually became the National Organisation of Girls' Clubs and the Association of Trained Charwomen (for women in London).<sup>203</sup> When Barbara Hutchins became a WIC member in 1899, editor of

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<sup>198</sup> *The Times* (London, England), November 21 1890; *Workman Times*, October 10 1890, in Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 8; B. L. Hutchins and J. J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* ([S.l.]: Bell, 1915), 120-121.

<sup>199</sup> *The Times* (London, England), November 21 1890; *Workman Times*, October 10 1890, in Soldon, *Women in British trade unions, 1874-1976*, 8.

<sup>200</sup> Barbara Harrison, *Not only the 'dangerous trades': women's work and health in Britain, 1880-1914*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 208..

<sup>201</sup> "At the Women's Co-operative Congress," *The Women's Signal* 80 (Thursday July 11 1895); Clementina Black, "A reply to Miss Boucherett upon the fall in women's wages," *Women's Industrial News* (June 1898): 54-56.

<sup>202</sup> "Working Girls from Rotherhithe, Homerton, Lambeth, St Pancras and Battersea Met Last Night at the People's Palace," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspapers*, Sunday March 28 1897.

<sup>203</sup> Women's Trade Union League, *Annual report and balance sheet 1897*, 46, 49.

*WIC Quarterly* and part of its executive in 1904, she helped cement WIC's perspectives on working-class womanhood.

## Parliamentary representation

While lobbying for women's equal access to the labour market, the Fawcetts lobbied for women workers' parliamentary representation. In East London less than 13% of its residents were qualified to vote in an election. Only male heads of a family over the age of 21 who were resident in their own dwelling or lodging and earning an annual £10 could vote. Given the history of workers' democratic movements for suffrage, the political power of the unfranchised was untapped.<sup>204</sup> In 1893, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) formed. It gained 30,000 paying members at its height through its promise of democratic parliamentary representation and its promise to change capitalism's inhumane system from within. Enid Stacey noted that 'as the Labour Party develops so the influence of the working woman increases'.<sup>205</sup>

Although the SDF and the ILP supported women's trade unions, they continued to ask women to prioritize class over sex liberation. Perhaps, this was why only 10% of their members were women.<sup>206</sup> As docker trade unionist Ben Tillett lobbied for the representation of labour through Parliament, Millicent Fawcett created the conduit for working women's demands for suffrage through the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).<sup>207</sup> Although NUWSS's suffrage campaigns were inclusive of class and cultural difference, some of its members continued to constrain working women's political inclusion.<sup>208</sup> At a suffrage conference, Amie

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<sup>204</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 241.

<sup>205</sup> Enid Stacey, "A modern socialist," *Woman's Signal*, Thursday September 12 1895, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>206</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4-5, 23.

<sup>207</sup> Ben Tillett, "The need of labour representation," in *Workers on their industries* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896).

<sup>208</sup> Anne Summers, "Gender, religion and an immigrant minority: Jewish women and the suffrage movement in Britain c.1900-1920," *Women's History Review* 21, no. 3 (July 2012): 399-418; Susan Tananbaum,

Hicks forthrightly took issue with a Mrs Sandford's view that poor women would sell their vote.<sup>209</sup> In 1898, Amie Hicks warned working women that, after helping such women to win the vote, they could still be denied the franchise. Hicks recalled how the middle class made use of her father's Chartist agitation to gain working people the vote and then reaped their sole advantage of the Reform Act 1867.<sup>210</sup>

This radical rhetoric saw the state's fear of social revolution only grow. Beatrice Webb believed the 'fear' was a middle class 'crise de conscience', or 'a class consciousness of sin' as it recognized that industrial organization had failed to provide for the majority. The Webbs' benevolent socialism advocated a move away from revolutionary socialism to 'new life' socialism, which desired a better life for the masses.<sup>211</sup> Some working women intersected in the broader middle-class women's movement and lifestyle clubs, such as rambling and cycling, where to some degree social barriers and taboos were forgotten. The League helped the middle class to develop a clear conscience through its use of the Consumer League's list of ethical suppliers.<sup>212</sup> The Webbs, like many others in the labour movement were confounded by the problem of vicious poverty. Many were influenced by economist Alfred Marshall's ideas of the creation of labour colonies with the cooperation of employers.<sup>213</sup>

Francis Peek's *The workless, the thriftless and the worthless* (1888) laid down its logical foundations as it blamed the cause of riots on the socialists' manipulation of the poor. Peek stated the unions would destroy the nations' trade and, of the

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"Democratizing British-Jewish philanthropy: the Union of Jewish Women (1902-1930)," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 20 (2010): 57-79 (67).

<sup>209</sup> "Mrs Henry Sandford on women's suffrage: Do women desire a vote?" *Cheshire Observer*, Saturday October 26 1895.

<sup>210</sup> *Clarion*, May 19 1905; Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, 118; Rohan McWilliam, *Popular politics in nineteenth-century England* (London: Routledge, 1998), 17-18.

<sup>211</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

<sup>212</sup> *The Women's Union Journal: the organ of the Women's Protective and Provident League* 8, no. 144 (January 15 1888): 7-8.

<sup>213</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society,..*" 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2013), 303-304

tramping destitute, less than 2% were of good character, as well as average in their trade. If convicts were offered food and shelter, why not offer the same to those in work colonies.<sup>214</sup> Charles Booth suggested removing his 'Class B', who lived in chronic want, to such colonies where they would be housed and fed, but unpaid.<sup>215</sup> The Webbs concurred that labour should be placed under plutocratic state control.<sup>216</sup> In 1890, General Booth and the Salvation Army set up such a colony in Hadleigh.<sup>217</sup> It is in this context that women workers recognized that, within the broad labour movement's leadership, clear gendered class lines still existed to constrain their political rights. As Amie Hicks stated 'it was not women who had made themselves into a class, but that was the work of the legislators of this country'.<sup>218</sup>

## Conclusion

Lady Dilke's presidency of the League not only undermined the success of women's trade unionism, but she also increased class and gender tension as she limited women workers' TUC representation and failed to deflect male antagonism towards women workers. The fact that workers queued to replace strikers further undermined trade unions' negotiation power. Dilke's actions created the dynamic in which Marian Curran, Clementina Black and others created new alternative platforms whilst they still maintained a political relationship with the League. The continuing dominating discussions that a woman's place was still in the domestic sphere split the labour movement. Although, at times class and sex differentials intersected by race and geography fractured workers' solidarity, workers were more frequently disregarding their differences as they recognised their collective experience.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Francis Peek, "The workless, the thriftless and the worthless," *The Contemporary Review*, 1866-1900, (London, England) 53 (February 1888): 39-52 (39-40, 52).

<sup>215</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 307.

<sup>216</sup> Rowbotham and Mitter, *Dignity and daily bread: new forms of economic organising among poor women in the Third Work* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 173.; James D. Young, *Socialism and the English working class: a social history of English labour, 1883-1939* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989) 34

<sup>217</sup> Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*, 311-312.

<sup>218</sup> "Women and London Reforms," *Shafts* (1893 Feb 4): 217-218

<sup>219</sup> Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1-15; Jennifer C. Nash, "Intersectionality and its discontents," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2017): 117-129 (123); Angela Martinez,

Working women, of their own volition, were forming unions. Labour geography by labour geography they were collectively building an industrial movement from below. Working women's agency was now being more regularly reported in the newspaper columns, such as Middlesborough's the *North Eastern Daily Gazette's* column 'London Notes' and the *Reynolds Newspaper: government of the people, by the people and for the people's column*, 'London Labour Movements'. As women militated their corporeal agency against their corporeal exploitation, they joined the socialist and parliamentary labour movement in demanding greater representation. Intersection in the labour movement was creating political change. As the Irish communities supported their own women workers' trade unionism in the confectionery, match making and ropemaking trades, the Jewish community was also supporting their own women workers through the ELTU and the Jewish Ladies' Tailors' & Mantlemakers' Union.

Women workers' solidarity as the antagonistic "political" empowered their challenge to the state to protect them. However, as they recognised the protective power of state legislation, they also recognised its constraints. Within the support for protective legislation there was a dichotomy in that workers hoped for greater protection, while many of the more powerful in the civil and political societies believed that state intervention would bring order and retain their class privilege. While such parts of civil society found workers' riots threatening, other parts recognized the political potential of workers' agency. Many in civil society now believed women workers a respectable permanent feature of the labour market. This legitimate access to the public sphere compounded women workers' industrial power from below.<sup>220</sup> Women workers were starting to create conduits for their materialist, political and corporeal agency through the suffrage movement whilst forcing

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Lee Martin and Susan Marlow, "Developing a critical realist positional approach to intersectionality," *Journal of Critical Realism* 13, no. 5 (2014): 447-466 (448); Neil M. Coe and David C. Jordhus-Lier, "Constrained agency? Re-evaluating the geographies of labour," *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 2 (2010): 211-233 (215).

<sup>220</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the politics of history* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 41.

employers to recognize their corporeal power to create industrial chaos as opposed to being constrained through polite entente cordials with their employers.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> "Women and London Reforms," *Shafts* (February 4 1893): 217-8.

## Chapter 8: 1900-1914: Opening the cage door

While some workshops became comparable to factories with better working conditions, most workspaces remained sweated and hazardous with trades reliant upon homeworkers. In 1902, Clara Collet noted that 'there is no hardship in women working for a living, the hardship lies in not getting a living when they work for it'.<sup>1</sup> Women workers' gendered sweated exploitation continued to be the catalyst for women workers' agency and, as a result, between the years 1900 and 1914, the expansion of the women's trade union movement was without precedent.<sup>2</sup> As women workers initiated strikes, many formed short-lived unions under the auspices of the League. As the League's national union membership rose to between 40,000 and 50,000, the League's Mary Macarthur recognized the potential political power of women workers' agency. In 1906, Mary Macarthur and Margaret Bondfield formed the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) to protect women workers excluded from male unions. In the same year, Macarthur also supported the formation of the National Anti-Sweating League (NASL) and the Trade Boards Act 1909, which set the minimum wage for individual trades.<sup>3</sup>

As the NFWW campaigned for protective legislation to ensure safer working conditions and maternal healthcare, the Labour Party's Women's Labour League also sought to harness the political potential of women workers through their campaigns for parliamentary representation. By 1914, women workers had encapsulated their demands for equal working rights with their suffrage campaigns. As they directed their agency through the East London Federation of Suffragettes,

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<sup>1</sup> Clara Collet, "Educated Working women: essays on the economic position of women in the middle classes (P.S. King & Son, 1902), 23, in Angela V. John, ed., *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 30.

<sup>2</sup> James D. Young, *Socialism and the English working class: a social history of English labour, 1883-1939* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989) 91.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* (London: Virago, 1984), 45; Angela V. John, "Macarthur [married name Anderson], Mary Reid (1880-1921), women's labour organizer," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed January 15 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30411>.

they created spaces and vehicles for their voices, as well as their corporeal agency as they sought political empowerment for themselves.

### Opening the Cage door

In 1900, Lady Dilke orientated the League's work in a three-pronged strategy of social research, trade unionism and campaigns for protective legislation from its imposing offices, as seen in Figure 38 below.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure38: Womens Protective and Provident League (WPPL) Office 1900**

(Source: *Englishwoman's Review*)

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<sup>4</sup> *Justice*, September 13 1902, in Karen Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 123; Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918" (PhD University of Sussex, 1995), 51.

The League undertook an inquiry into the difficulties of organizing women and trade unions' failure to protect workers. When it concluded that most women workers were still too vulnerable to victimization to be trade union members, it did not recognize how it had limited its TUC delegates and not deflected male antagonism towards women workers. However, a new period was about to be initiated. The League's Secretary, Mona Wilson, left the League in 1903 to join the National Health Insurance Committee. On Margaret Bondfield's recommendation, Mary Macarthur replaced Wilson as secretary. When Lady Dilke died in 1904, her niece, Gertrude Tuckwell, became the League's President. Tuckwell continued Dilke's three-pronged strategy. However, the League's affiliation scheme had created a rise in the number of male unions inclusive of women workers.<sup>5</sup> Although Dilke's presidency's support for protective legislation had gained the League male trade unionists' support, male trade unionists' opinions on protective legislation had become as stark, or as nuanced, as those of the women labour activists. The debate was now largely concentrated upon the hazardous nature of sweated work, which was largely directed by Beatrice Webb's and Margaret MacDonald who orientated the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW).

MacDonald, who was also a member of the Women's Industrial Council (WIC), was the daughter of the Home Secretary, Gladstone, and wife of the ILP leader, Ramsey MacDonald. Margaret MacDonald called for women to be prohibited from undertaking hazardous work and organized a campaign focused upon the job of barmaid. It was a job that MacDonald deemed hazardous to women, both physically and morally. In 1903, MacDonald, as Chair of the Joint Committee on Employment of Barmaids (JCEB), and with the strong support of the temperance movement, lobbied the Licensing Committee of the London County Council to support a new bill to end the employment of women as barmaids.<sup>6</sup> The bill potentially eliminated approximately 1,903 barmaids in London alone. The Barmaid's Political Defence League was formed in 1908 to defeat the bill on behalf of the '100,000' women who

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<sup>5</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891-1921: a study in motives and influences," *Women's History Review* 22.3 (2013) 478-496, 487

<sup>6</sup> "Barmaids," *The Daily News*, Tuesday December 22 1903; "The abolition of the barmaid," *The Shields Daily News*, Tuesday February 10 1903.

would be placed in an 'entirely precarious and insecure position, irrespective of any good conduct or misconduct on their part'.<sup>7</sup> The campaigns were reported in newspapers across the country.<sup>8</sup> As women workers recognized that their more secure work opportunities could be legislated away, they joined the women's trade union movement.

In 1898, the mixed-sex national Workers Union had formed with working-class Julia Varley as its chief women's officer, but there were still many male trade unionists that would not support combined unions. By 1906, as the national women's trade union movement mobilized to equalize women workers' rights, the movement had amounted to 2,210,000, of which 70,000 were members of the League.<sup>9</sup> Despite these numbers, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) still disqualified women from holding certain union offices under the pretext that their lower wages signified that they were only half members at delegate meetings.<sup>10</sup> In 1904, the General Union Secretary, Mr James Macpherson, took issue with the TUC's hypocrisy. Macpherson highlighted the unfair rules when he stated, 'they say that they are sympathetic until they are put to the test, and then impediments are put in the women's way, and because of this it requires three times as much power behind the woman before her ability is recognised'.<sup>11</sup> It was during this period that the former shop girl, Margaret Bondfield, who had 11 years 'experience working behind the counter' became a member of the League and WIC.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Position of Barmaids," *Morning Post* (London, England), Tuesday March 17 1908.

<sup>8</sup> "The licensing bill. Barmaids' protest," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Friday May 15 1908, 2; "Proposed abolition," *Daily Telegraph & Courier* (London, England), Monday November 2 1908, accessed April 10 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; Carolyn Malone, *Women's bodies and dangerous trades in England, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 125.

<sup>9</sup> Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014), 43; Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918" (PhD, University of Sussex, 1995), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920), 61-62.

<sup>11</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 63-64.

<sup>12</sup> "Silhouettes of society," *The Queen: The Lady's Newspaper*, April 20 1901, 648, accessed April 10 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 110-11.

Like Macarthur, Bondfield noted 'a large part of the League's union membership had built up as the League's organisers helped unorganised women strikers not supported by male trade unions'.<sup>13</sup> These small and struggling local trade unions were not in a position 'to do anything practical in the way of improving working conditions. A national organisation with local branches was more likely to win in any encounter with the employer'.<sup>14</sup> Bondfield and Macarthur, under the auspices of the League, initiated the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) to unionize women workers left unprotected by men's unions. Historian Cathy Hunt defines the differences between the Workers' Union and the NFWW as 'sex versus class'. Varley placed class allegiance over sex allegiance, believing 'trade unionism sexless'.<sup>15</sup> Macarthur abhorred sex antagonism within male trade unions and argued against it:

There is no inherent sex incapacity to recognise the necessity for corporate action. The probability of marriage is not the insurmountable obstacle we are often led to believe it is. One recognises, of course, that lack of permanence in women's employments militates against organisation, because it discourages technical instruction and lowers the standard of work; the lack of permanence however does affect men in the same way.<sup>16</sup>

Macarthur hoped that sex antagonism would dissipate, and that women would join mixed unions. Both Varley and Macarthur were regularly drawn into the debate on the woman's place in the labour market.<sup>17</sup> Macarthur acknowledged the narrow class prejudice of the more respectable, or higher skilled, semi-professional class of

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<sup>13</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 45

<sup>14</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 45; Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*, chap 1,

<sup>15</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 86-110 (88).

<sup>16</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, (Basingstoke; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 73.

<sup>17</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 86-110 (88).

workers towards trade unionism. She also recognised the political class differences within the League and the wider labour movement. Although Macarthur was from a comfortable entrepreneurial Scottish family, she was to some, including Gertrude Tuckwell, of a different class. Tuckwell believed that Macarthur had to be taught that 'tirades against the bourgeoisie' were out of place in an organization that was about "social cooperation".<sup>18</sup>

### **National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW)**

Despite their class differences, the League supported Macarthur as the Federation's President and Bondfield as its Secretary. In 1908, they exchanged positions.<sup>19</sup> The Federation's rallying cry 'to fight, to struggle, to right the wrong' encouraged feminism. Macarthur and Bondfield foresaw it as a powerful national organization of local branches affiliated to the TUC.<sup>20</sup> The Federation's Louisa Hedges organized a 'sturdy little band of dressmakers' into its first union in Clerkenwell. However, Hedges' views so challenged the League that she was dismissed in 1909.<sup>21</sup> The Federation then became affiliated to the General Federation of Trade Unions (established in 1890) by its President Peter Curran, who encouraged mixed unions.<sup>22</sup> With women's trade unionism increasing, in 1909, Bessie Ward addressed the TUC's lack of mentorship for women trade unionists. Ward channelled Emma Paterson's idea of Women's Trade Councils in the formation

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<sup>18</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891-1921: a study in motives and influences," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 3 (2013): 489.

<sup>19</sup> Cathy J. Hunt, "Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 86-110 (90).

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920), 45 .

<sup>21</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 64; Cathy Hunt, "Binding women together in friendship and unity?" *Media History* 19, no. 2 (2013): 139-152 (145). DOI: 10.1080/13688804.2013.791422 19:2; Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 46; Deborah Thom, "The bundle of sticks: women, trade unionists and collective organization before 1918," in *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England, 1800-1918*, ed. Angela John (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1886), 268-269.

<sup>22</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 49; Mary Agnes Hamilton and Mary R. MacArthur, *Mary MacArthur: A biographical sketch* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1925), 56-7.

of the Women's Councils, which acted as district advisory committees. A Miss Talbot stated that:

The object of these councils was simply the educating of women members and encouraging them to take active interest in their branches and district councils and the annual conferences and the national administrative work, hoping in this way to secure representation of women on all bodies. We felt that in working along these lines, rather than demanding that the rules to be altered to include proportional representation of women on all committees, we were taking the better course. Not making special treatment for women, but in allowing for every opportunity for their firm development along the same lines as men.<sup>23</sup>

Miss Talbot noted that, in London in 1909, 'it was impossible to call a meeting of 12 women', but, by 1912, there were more than 500 women attendees. Eventually, of the 12 councils, only London continued, as arguments with the male executive proved insurmountable to the other councils.

Macarthur saw that 'the hopeful thing' was not just that 'women are fighting for better wages. It is that they are developing a sense of loyalty to one another'. When Macarthur overheard a woman striker picketing factory gates 'urging her fellow-workers to stand by each other', 'the factory seemed to get smaller and smaller and the woman larger and larger. In her broken words I heard the dumb, inarticulate cry of broken women'.<sup>24</sup> Macarthur appealed to women workers to recognize that the 'Labour and Socialist movement was the only movement' which offered women equality with men, whilst noting that it is 'the woman who suffers most from industrial wrongs' and 'have the most to gain and the most to give'.<sup>25</sup> In 1911, 300 women at

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<sup>23</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> "The religion of the movement," *Labour Leader* (London, England), Friday April 28 1911, 271, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>25</sup> "The religion of the movement," *Labour Leader* (London, England), Friday 28 April 1911, 271, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

Murrays Confectionery factory initiated a strike simply to demand, as was always the case, the abolition of fines and permission for a tea break. They called a mass meeting at Clerkenwell Green. Macarthur, who was pictured on the front cover of the *Common Cause* in the middle of the strikers, advised them to form a union and strike fund.<sup>26</sup> The Federation helped the strikers formulate a claim inclusive of a wage rise. With the strength of their local community's support behind them, the strikers won the day and within two weeks the women had returned to work.<sup>27</sup>

In May 1912, the London Ladies Tailors Trade Union (LLTTU), formerly the London Tailoresses Trade Union (LTTU) encouraged approximately 12,000 workers in the East End to strike in solidarity with workers in the West End. A total 13,000 bespoke and slop garment makers from across London met on Mile End Waste Land and at Tower Hill.<sup>28</sup> The union's membership rose from 700 in 1912 to 3,000 in 1914.<sup>29</sup> In 1914, at the food preserving factory, Morton's, in Millwall, the anger of some 50 women workers, indignant at girls being employed on adult machines at lower wages, came to a head. They brought the whole workforce of 1,200 men, women, and girls and boys, out on strike. Many may well have been family members competing for the same work.<sup>30</sup> The National Union of Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union enrolled 960 of the women strikers into a women's union and the NFWW enrolled more than another 800.

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<sup>26</sup> "The Women's Strike in East London," *Common Cause: the organ of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, August 24 1911, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>27</sup> "Factory workers strike," *Leicester Daily Post*, Saturday August 20 1911, 5, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; Sarah Boston, *Women workers and the trade unions*, (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980), 71; Cathy Hunt, "The fragility of the union: the work of the National Federation of Women Workers in the regions of Britain, 1906-1914," In Mary Davis, (Ed) *Class and gender in British labour history: renewing the debate (or starting it)?* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2011), 181-182

<sup>28</sup> "How will the East End Assist?" *Daily Herald*, Monday May 6 1912, 12; "East End Assisting," *Daily Mail*, May 6 1912; "Tailors Strike: East enders go in: West enders go out," *Reynolds Newspaper*, Sunday May 26 1912, 1, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>29</sup> ~Anne Kershen, *Uniting the tailors: trade unionism among the tailoring workers of London and Leeds, 1870-1939*, (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995), 153-156.

<sup>30</sup> "Votes for activities," *Votes for Women*, Friday March 27 1914, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

Both men and women fought pluckily and with perfect loyalty to their trade unions and one another...No one who was present could ever forget the splendid enthusiasm of the three meetings in the Poplar Town Hall.<sup>31</sup>

The police raided one of the meetings and 'scandalously' cleared all the pickets away from the factory gates. 'Despite the fact that peaceful picketing is legal, one of the girls was arrested and charged with "disorderly conduct". However, after the workers voted to continue the strike, Miss Macarthur requested the police leave as it was a private meeting. The police thereupon departed.<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Herald* wrote:

It is almost impossible to believe that the law has become so partisan and one sided as these occurrences in the East End seem to show. But the police are playing with fire and fire turns. After their departure, it was announced that the Dockers' Union would contribute £10 a week to assist the men who are locked out. Especially hard cases will also receive the consideration of the Women's Committee. On Saturday a procession will march from the Millwall Cinema to Trafalgar Square, where a mass meeting will be held. Money is, of course, still wanted. Heraldites are responding liberally, but more is wanted. Miss Mary Macarthur announces that she has so far received £505 3s. Mrs. Julia Scurr, 13, Woodstock-road, Poplar asks us to acknowledge the following donations for Morton's strike:— Hon. Mrs. E. Haverfield, £2; Mrs. Hicks, £1; London University Student, 10s.; Anonymous, 2s. 2d. Total, 12s. 6d.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> "Millwall girl arrested," *Daily Herald*, Thursday March 26 1914, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>33</sup> "Millwall girl arrested," *Daily Herald*, Thursday March 26 1914, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

'Emboldened' women strikers were 'welling-up' with confidence as they marched in their Sunday best. As they picketed, organized and raised funds, they became leaders.<sup>34</sup> The experience became etched into people's selfhood, memories and history. The many strikes across London posed unprecedented problems for both union leaders and the state. Aware that the catalyst for strikers' agency was starvation, the League encouraged arbitration.<sup>35</sup> Macarthur noted: 'it has frequently been experienced by women, who form a union, or may be leading it, are victimised by an employer, who would not do so in the case of a man'. Macarthur knew that master associations voluntarily met with male unions to arbitrate grievances over minimum rates of wages and other demands. Campaigns against non-union labour still targeted women and some male unions were still not inclusive of female societies.<sup>36</sup>

Women's trade unions were still constantly folding. A union would disappear overnight when a workforce was replaced by new machinery, as happened in Whitechapel. Unions' numbers dwindled when women could not afford to maintain their militancy, or union subscriptions, or when they left to get married or changed their trade.<sup>37</sup> However some unions revived when working conditions again declined.<sup>38</sup> Macarthur recognized that women's double burden limited their time to become effective union members. She also highlighted that unionizing certain sectors, such as live-in domestic servants, was still difficult because they had limited free time outside of the house they worked in and their personal relationships with their employers made it impossible for them to renegotiate their working conditions.<sup>39</sup> Too many employers had little respect for their women employees, believing them:

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<sup>34</sup> Sarah Boston, *Women workers and the trade unions*, (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980), 70.

<sup>35</sup> Women's Trade Union League, *Annual report, 1911*.

<sup>36</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> ; Cathy Hunt, "The fragility of the union: the work of the National Federation of Women Workers in the regions of Britain, 1906-1914," in Mary Davis, (Ed) *Class and gender in British labour history: renewing the debate (or starting it)?* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2011), 181-182

<sup>38</sup> B. L. Hutchins and J. J. Mallon, *Women in modern industry* (London: Bell, 1915), 134-136.

<sup>39</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 55.

...like a lot of sheep...women much above them in class organize them, and then hand them over to pay their subscriptions into the treasury of the men's union, and I doubt very much whether they know what they are doing or get very much out of it.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, between 1910 and 1914, strike levels in Britain were four times higher than they had been in previous decades.<sup>41</sup> As a result, women's union membership stood at 357,956 in 1914.<sup>42</sup> The National Federation of Women Workers, the "Federation", had increased women workers' bargaining power through its centralization.<sup>43</sup> As Bessie Ward stated, in 25 years the 70 male trade unionists had failed to bring in sufficient female numbers, while the Federation's secretary represented thousands of organized industrial women at the TUC.<sup>44</sup> Macarthur stated that trade unionism educated women to become better citizens.<sup>45</sup> Although the League and the Federation's working-class organizers had little influence upon its union policies, it was through these middle-class platforms that women workers had organized themselves into a political force.<sup>46</sup> However, it was their permanence in the labour force that had legitimized women's place in the public sphere. Economic independence inspired the feminism that ensured that women workers

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<sup>40</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (Basingstoke; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 49

<sup>42</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Tea and sympathy: a study of diversity among women activists in the National Federation of Women Workers in Coventry, England, 1907-14," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 72 (2007): 173-191, 175.

<sup>43</sup> Sarah Boston, *Women workers and the trade unions*, (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980).

62; James D. Young, *Socialism and the English working class : a social history of English labour, 1883-1939* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989), 90.

<sup>44</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 65-66.

<sup>45</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Women's History* 24.1 (2012) 86-110, 92.

<sup>46</sup> Hunt, "Tea and sympathy: a study of diversity among women activists in the National Federation of Women Workers in Coventry, England, 1907-14," 180; Cathy Hunt, "Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891-1921: a study in motives and influences," *Women's History Review* 22.3 (2013) 478-96, 481-482.

were not prepared to see their work opportunities legislated away. As a woman who had worked for 60 years noted, 'a shilling you can earn yourself is worth two given you by a man'.<sup>47</sup>

The Federation also lobbied for the Factory and Workshop Act to include accident protection. It safeguarded its members' healthcare by registering under the National Health Insurance Act 1911 as an approved society. By 1914, the Federation had insured 20,000 members.<sup>48</sup> Given the majority of the Federation's members were married, the National Health Insurance Act's failure to cover 'incapacity due to pregnancy, or the after-effects of confinement' undermined the Societies' solvency. The Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG) and trade unionists campaigned for the Act to include maternity and sickness protection from three weeks before, and four weeks after, the birth, of those whose earnings were below the income tax limit.<sup>49</sup> Macarthur represented the Federation on the Departmental Committee and demanded these extensions to be embodied in the Factory and Workshop Act 1912. Macarthur also called for a state endowment of motherhood.<sup>50</sup> The Women's Local Government Society initiated a system of maternity welfare health visitors.<sup>51</sup> As the labour movement lobbied for health care protection it also campaigned for the minimum wage.

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<sup>47</sup> Joan Perkin, *Victorian women* (London: John Murray, 1993), 198; Carl Chinn, *They worked all their lives: women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 95.

<sup>48</sup> Hunt, "Tea and sympathy: a study of diversity among women activists in the National Federation of Women Workers in Coventry, England, 1907-14," 175.

<sup>49</sup> Boston, *Women workers and the trade union movement*, 92.

<sup>50</sup> "State maintenance of mothers," *Labour Leader*, Friday January 29 1909, 72; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 60; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman: and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history*, (New York: New York University, 1995) 155; Blackburn, "'Princesses and sweated-wage slaves go well together': images of British sweated workers, 1843-1914," *International labour and working class history* 61 (Spring 2002): 22-44 (25).

<sup>51</sup> "Health Visitors Bill," *Common Cause*, June 1911, 160.

## National Anti-Sweating League (NASL) and the minimum wage and the Factory Acts

Between 1898 and 1906, Sir Charles Dilke attempted to introduce statutory minimum rates of pay through a Wages Boards Bill. Despite support for the view that a minimum wage would ensure decent living standards, it failed to achieve a second reading.<sup>52</sup> In 1903, working women in Bethnal Green participated in an exhibition of sweated trades to highlight the need for a minimum wage.<sup>53</sup> In 1906, homeworkers supported the larger *Daily News* Sweated Industries Exhibition curated by Margaret MacDonald and the Federation's Macarthur. The exhibition highlighted the range of industrial work undertaken in homes.<sup>54</sup> The *Daily News*' proprietor, George Cadbury, was a wealthy cocoa manufacturer and executive member of WIC. The Home Secretary, Gladstone, and his wife visited the exhibition, 'both of whom manifested the keenest of interest in the workers'.<sup>55</sup> On the exhibition's last day, Macarthur called for a living wage. In its aftermath, Mr J J Mallon, who was an advisory member of the Federation executive, formed the National Anti-Sweating League (NASL) as a mechanism for delivering the minimum wage. Macarthur became an executive member.<sup>56</sup>

The *Daily News* coverage of the exhibition inspired a chain of similar events across the country and calls for inquiries into women's homework and wages.<sup>57</sup> The

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<sup>52</sup> Jenny Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, V.T., USA: Gower, 1986), 195.

<sup>53</sup> Margaret Stewart and Leslie Hunter, *The needle is threaded: the history of an industry* (Heinemann; Neame, 1964), 136.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Mudie-Smith, *Handbook of the Daily News Sweated Industries Exhibition* (London: *Daily News*, 1906).

<sup>55</sup> "Sweated industries. Visit of the home secretary. Gladstone's kindly act," *London Daily News*, Friday May 18 1906, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>56</sup> "To abolish sweating: formation of a new league," *London Daily News*, Wednesday July 4 1906; London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, *National Anti-Sweating League archives*. Boxes HD 2336, HD 2339.

<sup>57</sup> "Sweated industries at Guildford," *Common Cause*, Thursday October 26 1911, 501; "Worcester," *Common Cause*, Thursday November 14 1912, 553, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

House of Commons Select Committee on Homework called for evidence from homeworkers, employers and representatives of the labour movement. Macarthur stated, 'my experience is that in the unskilled women's trades there is no standard by which wages are computed, that there is very seldom any uniformity whatsoever, in homework or in factory work'. Macarthur argued that a legal minimum wage was the starting point for organizing sweated trades.<sup>58</sup> In a similar vein to Dilke's previous bill, three MPs introduced a Sweated Industries Bill, which demanded inspection and enforcement of workplace standards. The bill was referred to the Select Committee.<sup>59</sup> However, experience had taught Macarthur that homeworkers would not support intrusive inspections of their homes. While employers like Cadbury believed that a mandatory liveable wage standard would avoid the undercutting of wages and strikes, many powerful employers lobbied the government to avoid a national enforceable minimum wage. A compromise was established in the Trades Board Act 1909.<sup>60</sup> Its success depended upon the registration of workers.

Initially, the Act aided collective bargaining in the trades of paper box making, machine-made lace, ready-made blouses and bespoke tailoring. In 1913, another four were added. Mallon, who acted on behalf of the workers on most of the trades boards, found that the wages of three trades rose in three years.<sup>61</sup> Nora Vynne, who was a member of both the Ladies Langham Institute and NASL, founded the Homeworkers League in Oxford House, Bethnal Green, to register outworkers and

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<sup>58</sup> Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 120-121.

<sup>59</sup> House of Commons (1908) "Sweated Industries Bill," accessed March 23 2020, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/bills/sweated-industries-bill>; <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1908/feb/21/sweated-industries-bill>.

<sup>60</sup> Jenny Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Gower, 1986)156, 195-203; Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 105.

<sup>61</sup> London, London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, National Anti-Sweating League Box HD2339 "Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation*, 195-212; Pennington and Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985*, 112.

their rates of pay with a view to developing a wage board per trade.<sup>62</sup> By 1908, it had 3,000 members.<sup>63</sup> Some of its members joined Adult Suffrage Societies.<sup>64</sup> However, by 1912, the register only included 585 homeworkers, 38 men and 547 women. By August 1912, another 120 names had been removed. Four had died, 93 had left the district, three were no longer homeworkers, and of those still registered their addresses were incorrect.<sup>65</sup> Thomas Holmes formed the Homeworkers' Aid Association to help 'those employed in a hundred and one occupations'. By 1910, it had registered 500 members and had set up a home of rest for its members in Walton-on-the-Naze.<sup>66</sup> Workers clearly did not find registration useful or did not wish to be registered. The Chairman of the Minimum Wage Committee's insisted that women workers had not participated in the minimum wage campaign. Bessie Ward dismissed the statement and highlighted women workers' difficulties in participation.<sup>67</sup>

The Minimum Wage Committee campaigned with the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees and the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG). The WCG claimed that their 12,000 members and employers received a minimum wage from its 240 co-operative societies, including the Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS), located in East London. In 1912, the CWS adopted the living wage policy which could be applied to all classes of women.<sup>68</sup> Many trade unions and associations endeavoured to fix wage standards. In 1914, the London branch of the National Union of Printers' Warehousemen and Cutters drew up a scale fixing a rate for a 51-

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<sup>62</sup> Morris, *Women workers and the sweated trades: the origins of minimum wage legislation*, 195-212; Pennington and Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> London, London Metropolitan University, TUC Library, "Gertrude Tuckwell Press cuttings"; Pennington and Westover, *A hidden workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850-1985*, 120-121.

<sup>64</sup> *Justice*, December 28 1907.

<sup>65</sup> "Finsbury homeworkers and out workers," *Islington Gazette*, Thursday August 8 1912, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>66</sup> "Helping homeworkers," *Islington Gazette*, May 4 1910, 2, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>67</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 51-52.

<sup>68</sup> "Minimum wage for women," *Westminster Gazette*, Monday December 23 1912; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 53-56.

hour working work of 17s for bookfolders and sewers, 18s for vellum sewers, and between 20s and 30s for forewomen. A piece-work statement was also drawn up.<sup>69</sup> The London Society of Compositors' exclusionary rule that women should be paid 'strictly in accordance with scale' failed to meet wage standards. The smaller Mutual Association of Cigar Makers enforced piece rates for females as well as for males, albeit with a 20% difference. The National Union of Clerks demanded 'equal pay'. The National Union of Shop Assistants' 1908 inquiry into conditions concluded with the minimum weekly rate of 18s for women and 24s for men and a higher wage for a special class of worker. In London, shop assistants' earnings would be supplemented by 5s, but with living-in deductions. In East London, many trades remained without unions, and so employers in these trades were not constrained by minimum wages.<sup>70</sup>

## Parliamentary politics

In Farringdon in 1900, the SDF, ILP and other socialist and trade union members formed the parliamentary party: the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). Lady Dilke stated at the People's Hall in Leeds that 'she had ceased to belong to any of the Women's Liberal Associations, in order that there be no misunderstanding of her position, she belonged to the Labour Party and the Labour cause'.<sup>71</sup> However, the LRC failed to consolidate the labour movements' socialist factions, and, in 1903, the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) broke away. In 1904, the SLP reformed into the Socialist Party of Great Britain.<sup>72</sup> In 1906, the LRC became the Labour Party, which trade unionist Marian Curran defined as 'the men's party'. In 1908, the SDF formed the Social Democratic Party.<sup>73</sup> The Labour Party's leader, Ramsey MacDonald, recognized the potential power of women workers' agency. He

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<sup>69</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 51-52.

<sup>70</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Tea and sympathy: a study of diversity among women activists in the National Federation of Women Workers in Coventry, England, 1907-14," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 72 (2007): 173-191,175.

<sup>71</sup> Betty Ellen Askwith, *Lady Dilke: a biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 188.

<sup>72</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

<sup>73</sup> Collette, "For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18," 8, in *Holloway, A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918*, PhD, (University of Sussex, 1995), 67.

encouraged his wife Margaret and Mary Macpherson to form the Women's Labour League (WLL) 'to obtain direct Labour representation of women in Parliament and on all local bodies'.<sup>74</sup> The WLL maintained 'that protection allowed her to form her 'natural' duties of motherhood and household management'.<sup>75</sup> Macarthur and E. Harkness initiated the WLL's *Labour Woman*. Its first issue contained an article by Mallon praising the trade board, which at branch level proved bitterly controversial as they were urged to support them.<sup>76</sup>

Despite women's workers' presence in the labour movement, women still struggled to find a voice in their political parties. Even with Beatrice Webb being one of the Fabian Society's founders, women were only one-third of its membership. The Fabian Society did not recognize women's gender equality in politics. In 1907, Barbara Hutchins and others addressed this omission through their formation of the Fabian Women's Group. The WLL and the Fabian's Women's Group formed an alliance in championing protective legislation and argued that sweated labour could only be eradicated by removing competition of married women workers from the labour market. However, the WLL, as did the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, took care of strikers' children and congratulated women who stood shoulder to shoulder with men in disputes. The WLL 'very strongly' argued that politicians must not separate women in a labour movement composed of men and women. Macpherson was later replaced by Mary Middleton.<sup>77</sup> The WLL founded a

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<sup>74</sup> British Library, *Women's Labour League leaflets 08285/8277*; Margherita Rendel, "The contribution of the Women's Labour League to winning of the franchise," in *Women in the Labour movement*, ed. Lucy Middleton (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 70.

<sup>75</sup> Malone, *Women's bodies and dangerous trades in England, 1880-1914*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003) 123.

<sup>76</sup>Christine Collette, "For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18," (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).141-2, National Federation of Women Workers, *The woman worker: official organ of the National Federation of Women Workers*, ed. Mary Macarthur (London: National Federation of Women Workers, 1907-1910).

<sup>77</sup> Collette, *For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) 141-2; National Federation of Women Workers, *The woman worker: official organ of the National Federation of Women Workers*, ed. Mary Macarthur (London: National Federation of Women Workers, 1907-1910).

branch in Finsbury in 1910, in Hackney in 1913 and in Shoreditch in 1916.<sup>78</sup> Upon the deaths of MacDonald and Macpherson in 1911, the League's Margaret Bondfield took over leadership of the WLL until 1913.

WLL's better homes campaign drew women's attention and its membership rose to 5,000 by 1914.<sup>79</sup> ILP member, Katherine Bruce Glasier, in *Socialism and the Home* (1909) related 'the deterioration of the race as a result of mothers working in the factories to the neglect of the home, and the actual poisoning of the race through the mothers' work in the white lead, or other dangerous industries'.<sup>80</sup> While the WCG's attributed social problems, such as hooliganism, to working mothers, it also encouraged working-class women's political education and empowerment as citizens through local government.<sup>81</sup> By 1914, nationally, the WCG had 32,000 members in 611 branches.<sup>82</sup> Suffragist and WLL member, Lisbeth Simms, stated that she 'heartily approved of the home as a woman's place', but noted that an isolated woman in the home 'has a narrow outlook'.<sup>83</sup> Although the Labour Party, or the "men's party", recognized that they needed the political and mobilizing support of women, many "Left" men feared women's conservative politics, or antipathy, as well as feminism.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> London, British Library, *Women's Labour League leaflets 08285/8277*.

<sup>79</sup> Gerry Holloway, "A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918," PhD, (University of Sussex, 1995), 72.

<sup>80</sup> Katharine Bruce Glasier, *Socialism and the home* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1909), 11.

<sup>81</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century," *Journal of Women's History* 24.1 (2012) 86-110 92; Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001). 117-118; Holloway, *A common cause? Class dynamics in the Industrial Women's Movement, 1888-1918*, 61-66.

<sup>82</sup> Christine Collette, *For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18*, Collette, "For labour and for women: the Women's Labour League, 1906-18," (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 25-26; Karen Hunt, "Gendering the politics of the working woman's home," in *Women and the making of the built space*, eds. Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 108.

<sup>83</sup> Karen Hunt, "Gendering the politics of the working woman's home," 110.

<sup>84</sup> Karen Hunt, *Gendering the politics of the working woman's home*, 108.

The various socialist 'women's parties' recognized that, if they were going to win political rights, they needed to walk a tightrope between men's fears, whilst attracting working women's political agency. Perhaps for this reason the word "feminism", a word in its infancy, was misconstrued. Macarthur's biographer, Mary Agnes Hamilton, believed that Macarthur had far too sure a belief in the 'comradeship of the sexes to be a feminist' and defined her as an 'egalitarian'. Hamilton also stated that 'women were human beings – some good, some bad; to argue in favour of their emancipation was to insult them'.<sup>85</sup> Historians have also described Bondfield as non-feminist, yet she clearly campaigned for parliamentary equality. When Dilke's biographer, Betty Askwith, stated that the Labour movement was split between the Liberal intellectuals, who initiated the Labour Party, and trade unionists, she failed to clarify the existence of class difference. While Dilke represented the state's agenda in the League's trade unionism, some trade unionists endeavoured to represent workers when they entered parliamentary politics, or local government, as Bondfield did when she became an MP in 1923.<sup>86</sup> The WLL, WCG and other industrial organizations' branches in East London did not necessarily reflect the views of their women attendees. The NFWW's newspaper, *Woman Worker*, found that union members expressed their reliance upon wages and wished for better working conditions as opposed to the abolishment of their labour.<sup>87</sup> Women workers were also expressing their agency through the suffrage movement.

## Suffrage

The militant suffragette Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) recognized the strength of working women's agency. In 1906, working-class WSPU member, Annie Kenney, went to "rouse up" the East End. Kenney persuaded working women lobbying for the Unemployed Workmen's Bill to question Liberal politicians at the Albert Hall. On 16 February 1906, more than 300 women from Poplar and Bow

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<sup>85</sup> Cathy Hunt, 'Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century,' *Journal of Women's History* 24.1 (2012) 86-110, 88.

<sup>86</sup> Betty Ellen Askwith and Emilia Francis Strong, *Lady Dilke: a biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 189.

<sup>87</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Sex versus class in the two British trade unions in the early twentieth century," 90, 92-93.

marched to Caxton Hall to participate in the first Women's Parliament. 'The poorer women, some carrying babies in their arms, and all in dead earnest' marched on to Parliament to ask why women's vote was not part of their legislature programme.<sup>88</sup> On 21 February, Caxton Hall was once again 'crowded by a large number of working women of the poorer classes (a healthy sign of the improved times)', where Mrs. Pankhurst made a 'fervently enthusiastic chairwoman'.<sup>89</sup> Working women evidently recognized the WSPU as a potential conduit for their voices as they formed a Canning Town branch. They wrote to the WSPU, telling of their working and living conditions.<sup>90</sup> However, the WSPU wanted the vote for 'ladies' and did not want to compromise class privilege by offering the vote to working-class women. In January 1907, its working-class secretary, Mrs Knight, resigned from the WSPU because it was not 'keeping its promises to the working women'.<sup>91</sup>

The WSPU's loss was the SDF's gain. In 1907, the SDF endorsed local women in Canning Town, who formed an Adult Suffrage Society.<sup>92</sup> When suffragist Carol Ring saw male and women workers demonstrating for universal suffrage through the Adult Suffrage Society, she was encouraged to seek a supportive resolution from male trade unionists to support women's suffrage. Ring stated, 'personally, I think that the value of the resolution is as nothing compared with that of the educative work which is thus done amongst a class of men otherwise difficult to reach'.<sup>93</sup> In 1908, women workers from East London joined other working women in

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<sup>88</sup> "Women's Column," *Cambridge Independent Press*, Friday February 23 1906, 6; "Women workers and the vote," *Westminster Gazette*, Saturday February 17 1906, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>89</sup> "Women's work," *London Daily News*, Wednesday February 21 1906, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>90</sup> Barbara Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst: sexual politics and political activism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>91</sup> Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst: sexual politics and political activism*, 31.

<sup>92</sup> *Justice*, December 28 1907; Karen Hunt, *Equivocal feminists: the Social Democratic Federation and the woman question, 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 178.

<sup>93</sup> Carol Ring, "Trade Unions and Women's Suffrage," *Common Cause*, Friday December 5 1913, 649, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

a huge suffrage procession to Trafalgar Square.<sup>94</sup> WEDL and the NUWSS were together in Block V.<sup>95</sup> Their banners reflected their politics with the Barmaids Political Defence League, highlighting 'the serious displacement of women's labour by Act of Parliament involved in the attack on the barmaids' trade in clause 20 of the Licensing Bill'. Lancashire women's banners demanded: 'Give us women rights; the right to work, the right to vote'.<sup>96</sup> The NUWSS speakers told the crowd that the only way to change low pay was through the franchise:

The lowest wages earned by industrial workers are earned by women. The average wage of the industrial woman, reckoning her wage for a whole year, and taking into account overtime, short time, good work, and scarcity of work and fines, is between 7s and 8s a week...<sup>97</sup>

By 1911, crowds of working women were listening to Amie Hicks speak alongside other middle-class suffrage speakers.<sup>98</sup> Hannah Hyam, a member of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, set up its branches in Whitechapel, Bow, Bethnal Green Mile End and Limehouse to encourage Jewish suffrage.<sup>99</sup> The

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<sup>94</sup> "The Processions," *Votes for Women*, Thursday June 18 1908, 4, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>95</sup> "Formation of Procession," *Women's Franchise*, Thursday June 4 1908, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>96</sup> "Women and the suffrage: Saturday's procession: working women in Trafalgar Square," *The Times* (London, England), June 15 1908, 9.

<sup>97</sup> London, L.S.E., The Women's Library, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, *Women's suffrage and the protection of women workers: will the vote help women improve the conditions of their work?; Easier to starve* (November 1912), in bound volume of NUWSS leaflets, Cavendish Bentinct Library. 324.62306041 NUW.

<sup>98</sup> Sylvia E. Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London Virago Press 1977, 1931), 523; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 32.

<sup>99</sup> "Non-militant Demonstration, Poplar Town Hall," *Tower Hamlets Independent and East London Local Advertiser*, Saturday November 18 1911 accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; Anne Summers, "Gender, religion and an immigrant minority: Jewish women and the suffrage movement in Britain c.1900-1920," *Women's History Review* 21, no. 3 (July 2012): 405-406.

Actresses' Franchise League distributed its campaign publicity in East London stating that it was

...for the poor working women whose lives contain so little pleasure. An attractive programme is being arranged, consisting of suffrage plays, songs and recitations, besides good converting speeches. Mr. George Lansbury, M.P., has promised to help the League in Poplar, Bow, and Bromley, and is taking the chair at the first meeting in Bow on 30th March.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the WSPU's rejection of working-class women's suffrage, in 1913, Sylvia Pankhurst founded another WSPU branch, initially at 198 Bow Road, until it moved to the busier 321 Bow Road. It gained 30 to 40 members.<sup>101</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst mentally and physically immersed herself in East London. As she cleaned the branch's windows, 'industrial smells hurt her head' and she drew the links between working women's industrial exploitation and the politics of suffrage, anti-imperialism in the aftermath of slavery and the Fenian political agitation for Home Rule. 'Strange women of the underworld' remembered her from Holloway Prison. Many told her of their industrial lives. Pankhurst encouraged the attendees who packed out the meetings to speak publicly.<sup>102</sup> She knew that the women's movement could emerge in its 'great abyss of poverty' and encouraged the 'submerged mass' of women to be fighters on 'their own account'. She recognized that East London was the 'greatest homogeneous working-class area accessible to the House of Commons by popular

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<sup>100</sup> "Actresses Franchise League," *Common Cause*, Thursday March 23 1911, 11; "Actresses League at Poplar," *Votes for Women*, Friday May 19 1911, 10; London, L.S.E. *The Women's Library* 2AFL/A BOX FL598.

<sup>101</sup> "W.S.P.U in Poplar," *Daily Herald*, Wednesday March 12 1913, 11; E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London:Virago, 1977), 416; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 6.

<sup>102</sup> Barbara Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst: sexual politics and political activism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 33,48.

demonstrations'. Movements across the country also recognized the political power of women in East London to 'fortify the position of the working woman'.<sup>103</sup>

As the WSPU remained intransigent in its view that the vote was not for the working class, in 1914, Sylvia Pankhurst severed her WSPU links. Its branch members reformed themselves into the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS).<sup>104</sup> The ELFS's members initiated its newspaper, the *Woman's Dreadnought*, on Sunday, 8 March 1914. Financially supported by advertisers, such as Lipton's Cocoa and Neave's food, it was a vehicle for working women's materialist and political agency.<sup>105</sup> The paper stated that the East End movement was not 'merely for votes' but for:

An egalitarian society – an effort to awaken the women submerged in poverty to struggle for better social conditions and bring them into line with the most advanced sections of the movement of the awakened proletariat.<sup>106</sup>

Unlike the reports and journals of the League and the Association, the *Woman's Dreadnought* included not just the names but also the voices and actions of working women. ELFS's 60 members and other supporters raised its flag on 5 May 1914 at their new headquarters and cost restaurant at 400 Old Ford Road.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London: Virago, 1977; 1931), 416; Richard Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst: artist and crusader* (New York: London: Paddington Press, 1979), 160-1.

<sup>104</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London: Virago, 1977), 417, 418-419.

<sup>105</sup> *Woman's Dreadnought*, Sunday March 8 1914.

<sup>106</sup> "The East End Deputation," *Votes for Women*, Friday June 26 1914; Mary Davis, *Sylvia Pankhurst: a life in radical politics* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 38; Bishopsgate Institute, Sarah Jackson, "Votes, wages and milk: The East London Federation of Suffragettes," Podcast uploaded November 3 2015, accessed April 1 2018, <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/audios.aspx?vid=9991>.

<sup>107</sup> Patricia W. Romero, *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: portrait of a radical* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1987), 71; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 20.

Many of its members became irrepressible role models. Julia Scurr, who was born in Limehouse to Irish parents and was wife to SDF activist John Scurr, was a regular speaker and wrote petitions to Asquith. Englishwoman Nellie Frances Cressall was born in Kilburn to a carpenter. She regularly sold the *Woman Dreadnought* and attended demonstrations.<sup>108</sup> Jessie Stephen, a daughter to tailors in Marylebone, investigated 'the domestic servant problem'.<sup>109</sup> Bootmaker Jessie Payne was a mother of an adult with the mental age of a child and a devout member of the Salvation Army in Old Ford. Payne nursed Sylvia Pankhurst at her home at 28 Ford Road after she had been released from Holloway Prison following her hunger strike.<sup>110</sup> Payne later moved with Sylvia to ELFS's headquarters. Payne drew links between women's working rights and suffrage as she took on responsibilities for the co-operative boot factory. She once persuaded 50 strikers to come to an ELFS meeting.<sup>111</sup>

Mrs Bird, who had worked as a brushmaker for 43 years, became the secretary of the *Woman's Dreadnought*. She was also responsible for the ELFS district of Upper North Street in which her home at 90 Suffolk Street was located, and from where she distributed milk for babies.<sup>112</sup> Mrs Savoy, also a brushmaker, lived with two adopted orphan children on her wages of a penny farthing. It took her two hours to make a brush, yet she found time to regularly sell the *Woman's Dreadnought* and participate in demonstrations.<sup>113</sup> Former maid and docker's wife, Melvina Walker, from Grundy Street, Poplar, became such a fiery public speaker that

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<sup>108</sup> *Woman's Dreadnought*, June 27, July 11, September 12 1914.

<sup>109</sup> Jessie Stephen, "The Domestic Servant Problem," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday July 25 1914.

<sup>110</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, "Hunger strike...," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Sunday March 8 1912, 2.

<sup>111</sup> "Our Co-operative Boot Factory," *Woman's Dreadnought* Saturday October 17 1914, 1; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 17, 20.

<sup>112</sup> "Poplar," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday December 26 1914; "District report," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday May 2 1914.

<sup>113</sup> "District report," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday August 15 1914; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 1.

she was threatened with two months in prison.<sup>114</sup> Sixty-year-old Mrs Schlette organized a library and became a vigorous speaker who could talk for long periods.<sup>115</sup> Working women organized their own meetings on Sundays at 8 p.m. at the Women's Hall at 20 Railway Street, Poplar.<sup>116</sup> They ran the ELFS toy factory, which for fair wages supplied Selfridges, and the nursery 'Mothers' Arms'.<sup>117</sup> Amie Hicks regularly helped sell the *Woman's Dreadnought* and distributed milk to mothers.<sup>118</sup>

ELFS's working-class members' lives were surrounded by radical politics and militancy. They clearly developed their organizational and political skills alongside their suffrage activism. Amie Hicks spoke alongside Walker and other working women at a meeting that the *Daily Herald* stated 'fights for the suffrage movement' and requested that trade unions send representatives.<sup>119</sup> However, some, like John G. Ferguson, were suspicious of the *Daily Herald*, believing that it 'represents a mixture of syndicalism for poor men and political rich women' which speak at 'boys and girls', rather than for its supporters.<sup>120</sup> Middle-class Jewish women, Hyam, Minnie Lansbury, Rose Nellie Cohen and Millie Gliksten joined the ELFS. Lily

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<sup>114</sup> "Suffragette in Limehouse," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday June 6 1914, 6; Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals*, 524; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 16.

<sup>115</sup> "Our Co-operative Boot Factory," "Our mother and baby centre," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday October 17 1914, 1; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 17, 20.

<sup>116</sup> "Poplar," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday February 6 1915, 4.

<sup>117</sup> "Our Toy Factory," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday October 7 1914, 6, Saturday October 31 1914, 1, Saturday November 7 1914, 1; "The Nursery," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday October 31, 1, Saturday November 14 1914, 1-2; Rosemary Taylor, *In Letters of Gold: The Story of Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of the Suffragettes in Bow* (London: Stepney Books, 1993), 15-17, 21, 30.

<sup>118</sup> "Good News," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday September 19 1914, 3-4.

<sup>119</sup> "Outside Meeting," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Sunday March 8, 5.

<sup>120</sup> "Public Halls," *Daily Herald*, Monday February 9 1914; "Daily Herald Nuisance," *Justice*, Thursday January 1 1914, 7; "Daily Herald fights for the suffrage movement," *Vote*, July 31 1914, 15.

Montague taught Jewish working girls of their industrial rights.<sup>121</sup> The ELFS's voices evidently became too loud as they were forced to call an outside meeting 'to protect against the refusal of Public Halls to the suffragettes'. They demanded that the Prime Minister Asquith meet their deputation.<sup>122</sup>

When Pankhurst asked for participants to represent working women in the deputation to Asquith, 'thousands' of eager women workers responded. Asquith prevaricated until he could no longer delay the meeting. As the selected Mrs Watkins, Mrs Bird, Mrs Payne, Mrs Julia Scurr and Mrs Daisy Parsons informed Asquith of their working and living conditions, women from the East End paraded in Downing Street. The deputation was reported around the country.<sup>123</sup> As working women established ELFS branches in Bromley, Stepney, Limehouse, Bethnal Green and Poplar, their members learned to speak from podiums.<sup>124</sup> At one meeting, Schlette took issue with the view that 'the Bible condemns militancy':

You know the sort of militancy God done when he burnt Sodom and Gomorrah. He removed the cause of the trouble by burning the whole lot. People need not think that woman was man's inferior because she was created after him. God made the world first and found it couldn't get on without light so he created light: and when he made man he must's found there was [something] deficient about him. So, he created woman as a helpmate, mind you, not a general servant...it was the

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<sup>121</sup> Anne Summers, "Gender, religion and an immigrant minority", 406; Linda Gordon Kuzmack, *Woman's cause: the Jewish woman's movement in England and the United States, 1881-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 82-86.

<sup>122</sup> "Public Halls," *Daily Herald*, Monday February 9 1914; "Daily Herald Nuisance," *Justice*, Thursday January 1 1914 7; "Daily Herald fights for the suffrage movement," *Vote*, July 31 1914, 15.

<sup>123</sup> "Asquith mulishness," *Daily Herald*, June 17 1914, 2 accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; "Prime minister and the suffragists: deputation of working women," *Linlithgowshire Gazette* (West Lothian, Scotland), Friday June 26 1914 accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; "How it happened," *Women's Dreadnought*, Saturday June 27 1914, 3-4; E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals*, 429.

<sup>124</sup> "District Reports," *Women's Dreadnought*, 1914, 4.

woman who was told that she should bruise the serpent's head. Give us Votes for Women...so that we can bruise his head the better.<sup>125</sup>

Not all women workers were part of East London's political radicalism. When the forewoman fired Florence Buchan for speaking out on confectionery working conditions, she asked her, 'What do you want to kick up a disturbance of a night with the suffragettes for?'<sup>126</sup>

After the start of World War I in August 1914, food shortages pushed prices up as trades closed down. Working-class women mobilized as consumers as they strategized on a war on unemployment and high prices.<sup>127</sup> Melvina Walker told women worried they would not be able to afford to retain their homes, that the 'war is on us'. 'If we all stand together no government can conquer us...no vote, no rent'.<sup>128</sup> As men were signed up, women were called to work on low-paid government contracts. The ELFS asked Mr Lloyd George to clarify the Treasury's pay agreements with employers for women's work. He stated that gender 'shall not adversely affect the rate customarily paid for the job'. Lloyd George clarified women 'would get the same piece-rate as men were receiving before the date of the agreement...if the women turn out the same quantity of work as men, they will

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<sup>125</sup> "Visitors from overseas," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday July 18 1914, 3.

<sup>126</sup> Florence Buchan, "Jam making," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Sunday March 8 1914, 2-3, "Pinks strike," "The strike and the women at home," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday May 23 1914, 3; Sylvia E. Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals*, (London Virago Press 1977, 1931), 438, 440, 524.

<sup>127</sup> "Socialist Women's Conference," *Justice*, (Saturday September 3 1910) 12; "The British Socialist Paper," *Justice*, Saturday December 2 1911, 1; "Socialist Sunday Schools," *Justice*, Saturday November 9 1912; "Women's work: what can we do?" *Justice* Saturday March 29 1913, 1-2; "Women's war on high prices," *Daily Citizen* (Lancashire, England), March 9 1914, 5; "Wives' union to keep down food prices," *Wells Journal* (Somerset), Friday March 13 1914 accessed March 20 2021 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, (London: Routledge, 2002). 140-142.

<sup>128</sup> Melvina Walker, "War, work and the food supply: what women want," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday August 15 1914, 1; "Providing work," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday September 5 1914, 2-3.

receive exactly the same pay'.<sup>129</sup> However, with government support, employers blatantly exploited women's lower wages. The Engineering Employers Federation stated:

The introduction of female labour might be used to lead to the lowering of the rate of payment for services. The fact of the matter is not that women are paid too little, but that men are paid too much for work that can be done without previous training. It is only the trade union which, after the war, will stand in the way of our realising the anticipation that we might be able to reduce our workshop costs by the employment of women. Much depends on the attitude of the women themselves. If they can be brought to see the economic advantages to the country and recognise the facts we have put forward, and to agree to accept a lower scale of wages than skilled men, they may, by their preponderance of numbers, be in a position to defy the unions.<sup>130</sup>

The NFWW galvanized such hostility to the statement that it had to be withdrawn.<sup>131</sup> *Votes for Women* noted that 'if this war kills the prejudice against women doing so-called men's work it will have accomplished a bigger thing than anything it proposes to do in a political sense!'<sup>132</sup> While working women were evidently participating in the labour movement's middle-class platforms, not all were convinced by either the Labour Party or the middle-class suffrage and social welfare campaigns. Melvina Walker's article clearly indicates that working-class women wanted not just to express themselves to each other, but also to be heard:

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<sup>129</sup> "War office contracts," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday December 5 1914, 2-3; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Virago, 1984; 1920) 71.

<sup>130</sup> Salford, *Working Class Movement Library*, Government circular 1915; Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 73.

<sup>131</sup> Drake, *Women in the Trade Unions*, 73.

<sup>132</sup> "Women's Sphere," *Votes for Women*, Friday October 2 1914, 7, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

Whilst on my way to the Caxton Hall I thought this is the first Labour Women's Conference held under the auspices of the New Labour Party. I looked at the agenda and thought what a milk and water thing it was. I was only partly in sympathy with most of the resolutions; with some I entirely disagreed. Furthermore, I know that resolutions are all talk and no doing.

You may ask "Then why go to the Conference at all?" My answer is that I realised the great opportunity of meeting working women from all parts of Britain; of being able to hear directly what they were thinking although they might not agree with me, or I with them. I should be able to express my thoughts and views to those women who are toiling in their homes and workshops and who have the same struggle as I to live, and who like myself have been chloroformed in the past by parsons and pious ladies who tell poor women that if they want better homes, they must wait till they get up above for heaven is their home.

I wondered whoever the working women I was to meet at the Conference had found the remedy for evil social conditions or whether, like some of our fortunate sisters who have been *educated*, they would be merely waiting for a change of heart to come over our employers, landlords, and profiteers under whom we have lived for centuries.

I wondered whether the millions of toiling women who have just got the vote will put their trust in Liberal and Tory politicians as men did and whether the women at this Conference would blindly follow official Labour men. Would these women be prepared to accept a Ministry of Health, Maternity and Child Welfare, and all sorts of other pettifogging Acts instead of the real act of emancipation which would set up a Socialist State like that in Russia.

All Labour men are not Socialist, and I for one am not prepared to vote for a Labour man unless he will stand by the workers and help us in our fight for Socialism which is our only hope. We must not leave the work

for Socialism even to Labour and Socialist Members of Parliament; we, the workers, must take the power into our own hands and destroy the capitalist system which is destroying the lives of our infants and our boys. We can only establish Socialism by organising as a class to take possession of the earth and the machinery of production and to abolish the wage system. With these thoughts in my mind, I arrived at Caxton Hall. Dear old Caxton Hall; how many times during our fight for the vote have we working women stood up in that hall and declared our desire for emancipation. I sat close to the door and watched the groups of women coming in. I could pick out the Cockney women, the women from East and West London, from Wales and Scotland. I saw comrades who had given me hospitality in the Provinces: it really was a reunion.

Then the Conference started. Dr. Ethel Bentham was in the chair. At the back of the hall we heard very little of what she said, for she spoke in a low voice and what we did catch was broken off by her continually looking down at her notes on the table, so I cannot comment on her opening remarks. Miss Mary Macarthur moved the first resolution on the civic rights of women. She made a very stirring [timely] speech, urging the right of women to sit in Parliament, and the need for Adult Suffrage. She also touched on the great joy of motherhood, and I noticed some of the educated spinsters on the platform looking at one another and smiling as if they entirely disagreed with her. The working women in the body of the hall showed their agreement by rounds of applause.

Mrs Sydney Webb seconded the resolution. I was not at all taken up with her remarks. We heard something about women with superior brains. One couldn't help feeling we had had enough of 'superior brains' in the past: we want practical. The speeches from the platform were far too long and when we adjourned to lunch, delegates were saying that they had not come to hear the platform, but the rank and

file. The afternoon speeches were just as long and very wearisome and we decided to stop that the next day.

Women wanted to know why, since this was a Labour Conference, and the Chairman changed at each session, working women could not be in the chair. "Oh!" said one woman, "You see the reason for that is that we are not educated and couldn't conduct the business properly!" Said a miner's wife, "Why I could do it better than them! Why she had – alongside of her, telling her what to do all the time and knocking her foot, and when – left the platform for a few minutes she didn't know how to carry on." "Yes," said a docker's wife when we were having tea, "it's – all the time in the chair; the Chairman is just an ornament." "Well, I know," said a tramway man's wife, "if I was in the chair I wouldn't be guided by no one but myself, and I wouldn't want to hear so much of the platform, but more of the rank and file!" "Why shouldn't we have," said a delegate from Nottingham, "a railway man's wife in the chair at one session and a docker's wife at another session; why have we got to listen to all these people who don't understand us."

A woman from South Wales said, "All these women who have captured office in the Labour Party are not Socialists, and my advice to you women is to give up the Labour Party!" "No," I said, "that must not be. We must do what Havelock Wilson said the I.L.P. had done, 'captured the Labour Movement'. We Socialists must stay in the Labour Party." I gathered from the working women at the Conference that they want the Labour Party to be the real Socialist Movement and are not going to be contented with such sops as a Ministry of Health. As one of them said: "Give a me £5000 a year to be the Minister of Health; create a staff with £500 a year each, to throw the likes of us a few quinine pills! What's the good of a Ministry of Health while we live under the capitalist system."

Working women wake out of your long sleep, keep your eyes open, organise yourselves; don't be led away by people with 'superior brains'.

We have something more than that; we have practical experience. The more humble your station in life may be, the more bitter your struggle the greater is your experience. Don't let us be discouraged, but let us face the future never being ashamed to show under what banner we stand.<sup>133</sup>

In 1916, the ELFS evolved into the Workers Suffrage Party.<sup>134</sup> Women workers in East London clearly felt that they no longer required middle-class platforms to speak from. So, when, in 1914, Fabian Mabel Atkinson noted the co-existence of the women's middle-class and proletariat movements, she failed not just to acknowledge the class intersection in both movements but also the class intersection in the huge numbers of emboldened, resentful women workers' militant agency and their influence from below.<sup>135</sup> Atkinson's statement that there was less 'sex consciousness' among working women than middle-class women at the turn of the 20th century does not necessarily indicate that working-class women were less feminist.<sup>136</sup> It was through their solidarity that women workers' developed their feminist social amelioration and citizenship from below. As they began their 20th-century struggle to open their caged door they continued to overcome the social injustices that defined their unequal position in society whilst trying to survive.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Melvina Walker, "My impression of the Women's Conference," *Woman's Dreadnought*, Saturday November 2 1918, 2, accessed March 16 2021, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>134</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: the history of the women's militant suffrage movement 1905-1910*. (New York: Sturgis & Walton Co., 1911); E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals* (London: Longmans & Co., 1931); Barbara Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst: sexual politics and political activism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996).

<sup>135</sup> M.A., "The two women's movements 1914," In Patricia Hollis, *Women in public, 1850-1900: documents of the Victorian women's movement*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979). 334.

<sup>136</sup> Mabel Atkinson, *The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement* (London, 1914), 15.

<sup>137</sup> National Federation of Women Workers, "Woman worker: official organ of the National Federation of Women Workers," ed. Mary Macarthur (London: National Federation of Women Workers, 1907-1910), In Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement*. (London: Davis-Poynter, 1980). 91; Harold Benenson, "Patriarchal constraints on women workers' mobilisation: the Lancashire female cotton operatives, 1842-1919," *The British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 4 (December 1993): 613-633 (614-

## Conclusion

Between 1900 and 1914, civil society's largely middle-class organizations and platforms of the labour movement had become a closely-knit community of socialist organizations, which included the Independent Labour Party, the Workers Education Association, the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, Industrial Law Committee, the National Union of Women Workers and the National Anti-Sweating League, which were all mostly located within walking distance of industrial East London.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, a minority of the upper class, such as Jessie Boucherett, Lord and Lady Dilke and National Union of Women Workers' member Lady Sandford, were still at the pinnacle of the integral state's involvement in the middle-class labour movement. While Martin Francis also concludes some 'privileged women's Labour activism was another stage in the long tradition of middle-class philanthropy', Henry Pelling stated that the middle-class 'new woman' was as important as new unionism was to the Labour movement.<sup>139</sup>

Middle-class civil society's expansion of the labour movement mostly maintained class difference. Mouthpiece for the social feminist movement, Beatrice Webb, became increasingly entrenched in her views that the educated should speak for the uneducated. Yet given the emphasis placed on education, educational and industrial training opportunities still eluded most women workers. In 1912, a Labour College for Working Women was just a mere proposal. Class difference so pervaded the labour movement that many believed the English working class to be the most backward in Europe. The labour movement had bureaucratized socialism through ex-worker officials to the point that they were 'an impenetrable barrier against

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633); Harold Benenson, "The 'Family Wage' And Working Women's Consciousness in Britain, 1880-1914," *Politics and Society* 19, no. 1 (1991): 71-108 (79-92)..

<sup>138</sup> London, British Library, *WLL Leaflets* 08285/8277.

<sup>139</sup> Cathy Hunt, "Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891-1921: a study in motives and influences," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 3 (2013): 481; Lucy Middleton, "Women in Labour politics," in *Women in the Labour Movement: the British experience*, ed. Lucy Middleton (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 22.

socialist projects'. As Annie Besant noted, they were not advocating true equality let alone socialism.<sup>140</sup>

Despite many middle-class activists growing more radical and acknowledging the industrial sweated exploitation as the cause of workers' poverty, most still believed that social welfare could remedy poverty. Social welfare provision, which historians have defined as social maternalist feminism, had come to dominate a large part of the women's labour movement's politics.<sup>141</sup> Philanthropic and state social welfare was in stark contrast to the working-class grassroots' social welfare that had filtered through communities. Working-class social welfare highlighted social injustice and class difference as it endeavoured to create political and social change. Working women's experience of the middle class labour movement, coupled with their sweated exploitation, continued to be a strong catalyst for their agency in the labour movement. Women workers' resentment of their participation being limited to a physical description had moved them beyond relying upon manifesting a corporeal representation of their political ideas. Melvina Walker clearly describes working-class women's individual volition and materialist agency to transmit ideas of change. She wanted these ideas to not just permeate East London, but also the rest of the country. Women workers had recognized that they had to create their own platforms and spaces through which they could strategize directly with each other. Their Labour and trade union activism for change had moved to directly addressing the state through deputations as well as through demonstrations.

As middle-class women workers joined the ranks of the traditional working-class women in outcast London they developed their capacity to speak from these poor margins. By 1900 'exhausted and downtrodden women were wakened as from

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<sup>140</sup> James D. Young, *Socialism and the English working class: a social history of English labour, 1883-1939* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1989), 33.

<sup>141</sup> Claire Annesley, "Women's political agency and welfare reform engendering the adult worker model," *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 3 (2007): 452-466 (453); Lewis and Davis, "Protective legislation in Britain: 1887-1990: equality, difference and their implications for women" *Policy and Politics* 19.1 (1991) 13-25 (14-15).

sleep and began to conceive new hope and purpose'.<sup>142</sup> By 1914, at the start of the world war, women were entering, unhindered by male antagonism, every part of the labour market. As they became horse drawn drivers, packers, labourers and timber yard workers, they recognized their industrial power as the state and employers were ever more reliant upon their labour. As women assumed their natural right to work in the labour market, they were also assuming their right to access all aspects of the public sphere, including that their voices were heard by the state and wider society. However, the country's reliance upon women workers did not eradicate their exploitability. By 1918, in East London, there were 2,000 unregulated workshops. It cannot, therefore, be underestimated the strength of agency that was still required to be a women's trade union activist.<sup>143</sup> As Elizabeth Roberts states, only the 'most militant, most politically conscious' women were likely to be the most committed unionists'.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Louise Raw, *Striking a light: the Bryant and May matchwomen and their place in history*, (London: Continuum, 2011).70.

<sup>143</sup> Angela V. John, "Introduction", in Angela V. John ed., *Unequal opportunities: women's employment in England 1800-1918* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 30.

<sup>144</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *British women in the nineteenth century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 114

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion: Working-class women's feminist citizenship from below**

This prosopography writes working-class women's agency between 1840 and 1914 into East London's history. Working-class women developed their agency through East London's socio-economic and political landscape. They manifested their political-feminist way of life through their four pillars of volition, materialist, political and corporeal agency as they intersected in the labour force and labour movement. The usefulness of the four pillars of agency as a tool for measuring agency is apparent when comparing the agency of different individuals. Although agency may have been galvanized, even facilitated, by another, it stemmed from the volition of the person who enacted their agency. Gendered working-class sweated corporeal experience of lowness and lack of power and autonomy was working women's catalyst for their volition to manifest political agency. Just as experience and agency was relational so was positionality in the power structure and agency. It was not simply that, the more powerful position a person had in society, the greater their need to manifest agency. It appears that, the less given power a constrained person had, the greater the required effort to achieve political agency.

As women workers' experience and agency interrelated with economic troughs, severe destitution gave rise to bouts of temporal militancy and historical moments of change. As the theory of intersectionality alludes to, the power structure within a social movement is complex and, as the broad labour movement reacted to these moments, working-class women impacted the movement from below. Working women's clearest political agency can be seen in their trade unionism through which they enforced their right to be heard publicly and to influence the state as they developed their feminist citizenship from below. During the 1840s, employers were already taking advantage of the saturated labour force and were using women workers, who by virtue of their sex were deemed unskilled and cheap, to set the wage standard and exploitative conditions. The vertical disintegration of skilled work into unskilled processes made manufacturing more efficient and gave the capitalist and employer complete control. Deskillling industrial manufacturing processes

reduced a reliance upon more expensive male artisan work. It not only undermined the artisan's control over their working conditions, but it also ensured a saturated labour force in which whole families were forced to earn a combined family wage.

As male workers were pitted against female, male trade unionists called for protective legislation that excluded women workers from the male public sphere of the labour force. It is in this unequal context that women integrated themselves into the labour force and the political platforms of the earlier democratic and labour movements. Individual agency was not enough to create change and so workers sought first to identify with those who most shared their experience. Collective experience as the "political" was the foundation of workers' uneven political autonomy and power in society. As political activists recognised collective experiences that defied differences, the labour movement grew.

The labour market and labour movement depended upon the spatial interrelationships of industries and trades, factories, workshops, streets and homes. Workers' homes were often located near their workplaces. The seasonal nature of work saw workers in different workspaces at different times throughout the year. It was women workers' flexibility in their labour geographies that allowed women to find work and survive the economic troughs and periods of mass unemployment. For many, the home was their industrial workplace. Isolated homeworkers were often deemed too difficult to organize, but it was through their spatial connections as they collected and delivered outwork to the workshops and factories that they became part of women's materialist agency of dissemination of political thoughts and actions. Homeworkers would often, at different points in their lives, work in the larger workplaces. Homes were not isolated islands but located in densely populated buildings, which became sites of social welfare, political ideas, collectivism, perhaps even entrepreneurial spirit, as well as exploitative waged work.

The radical feminist words of those who persuasively subverted male texts, or who spoke more directly to women to challenge patriarchy, like those of Elizabeth Neesom, Ann Walker and Suzannah Inge and the nine trade union secretaries would have resounded in homes. The fact that Walker and Inge were caricatured as "hens" and civil society belittled trade unionists only promoted their words and agency.

These attempts at disavowal perhaps even strengthened the feminist resolve of others.<sup>1</sup> Local politics radiated from radical families, like the Neesoms during the 1840s and the Hicks in the later period. Materialist agency evolved the antagonistic political as ideas were disseminated through meetings, newsagents, newspapers, costermongers and outworkers. The ideas would continue through the crowded dwellings and workspaces of East London's collage of small labour geographies. As women resiliently sought to survive on their industrial wages, their experience became political as they evolved their communities into interdependence.

It is in the context of the 1840s that the women bible binders continued the agency of previous generations in their struggle to renegotiate working conditions. As their quiet negotiations failed, Mary Zugg called upon Thomas Dunning and Edward Edwards to publicly highlight their cause. As the bible binders' strike became a newspaper campaign impecunious middle-class women were taking up respectable needlework trades. The strikers raised the sympathetic profile of victimized sweated workers and sent political waves through the local labour geographies and the country. It influenced the local needlewomen, a minority of whom were taking up the better working conditions found in the middle-class cooperative initiatives. Parts of middle-class civil society preferred to see the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) as a veritable Victorian institution and believe its denial of its exploitation of women workers. Other parts of civil society, as represented by John Hollingshead, recognized that writers like Thomas Beames reconstructed workers' identities into oppressive geometrics of marginalization. As writings such as Beames and the use of Antoine Valérie Bertrand's illustration invalidated workers' voices, the integral state's civil and political societies validated their own voices as superior and protected their class privilege.<sup>2</sup> This marginalization gave employers, like the BFBS, who were themselves part of the integral state, the same discriminatory power to ignore workers' voices of arbitration and protest.

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<sup>1</sup> "City of London Female Charter Association, *Chartist ancestors*," accessed April 14 2019, <http://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/city-london-female-charter-association/>.

<sup>2</sup> Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, *London, a pilgrimage* (London: Grant & Co., 1872), 124.

During the late 1850s and 1860s working-class democratic and labour platforms diminished. Although working-class women appear to quieten, their passivity cannot be assumed. Selfhoods were still being moulded through industrial experience and education in the home. As middle-class civil society recognized that their own were joining the ranks of impecunious industrial workers, even becoming fallen women, they could no longer argue that the poor were simply uncivil degradation. Workers' political agency may well have influenced the birth of the middle-class labour movement in the form of the Society for Promotion of Employment of Women (SPEW). SPEW galvanized the integral state's civil society to protect the economic needs of women workers and their need to earn a respectable wage. It strategized solutions to create women workers' equal opportunities as it evolved feminist ideas of industrial womanhood.

Although a staunch opponent of protective legislation, SPEW invited the advocate of such legislation Earl of Shaftesbury to become its President. Perhaps as a figurehead, Shaftesbury, whose advocacy of appropriate types of women's waged work, reclaimed women workers their respectability. Thomas Dunning acted as the workers' hegemonic bridge in his influence upon civil society's John Stuart Mill and the National Association for the Promotion of the Social Science. Dunning persuaded the integral state that trade unions were the means to avoid industrial chaos as they balanced the power between workers and employers. In doing so, Dunning did not just encourage the state's acceptance of trade unions but also embedded trade unionism in the state's solution to maintain social control. As support for trade unionism developed in middle-class civil society, the concept of women as a class grew. Emma Paterson, who perceived herself as a worker, built on the concept of class intersection in mutual support when she initiated the Women's Protective and Provident League. Paterson created the League's original political "equal rights" stance as she negotiated the class privilege of its funders. As activists intersected through the League, they created personal networks. Such networks were expanded with the formation of the Women's Trade Union Association. As personal relationships developed between middle and working class trade unionists, ideas were exchanged, and some elements of solidarity formed. Although there is evidence that there was some genuine inter class respect, it cannot be assumed that all women workers perceived themselves as part of one class with

all women. In fact, as class intersection developed so perspectives of class and cultural differences cemented in the labour movement.

The platforms of the League and the Association were supported by local civil society, and it was through the spaces provided by local clergy that women workers developed their four pillars of agency. Although women workers' attendance of the League's meetings and their unionization under its auspices validated its existence, their voices were not generally recorded in the League's *WUJ* and annual reports. Initially, the League won the support of employers. Perhaps in the 1870s struggling employers recognised that like, the BFBS contractors they were being sweated too to the point of existing rather than creating profits. For most working-class women, hopes of a comfortable family life would have sufficed because aspirations of educational and intellectual fulfilments would have seemed an impossible dream.

The League's supporters organized meetings in their built spaces, such as at Toynbee Hall, which as intersectional theory suggests, allowed those with more power to set the agenda of the movement. The middle class labour movement did not centre their campaigns on working women's words, but they centred it around their own perspectives on working women's lives. Middle class supporters of trade unions, such as the Rev. Barnett, often imposed their views of women workers' poverty upon the women workers who attended their meetings. Indeed, as the Barnetts of Toynbee Hall supported Jewish women's trade unionism, they racialized East London through the work *The Jew in London: a study of racial character and present-day conditions*.<sup>3</sup> Yet it was in these same spaces that the working-class trade union secretaries spoke from the same podium as the Barnetts and other middle class activists. As workers heard the secretaries speak from experience, the secretaries influenced the formation of women workers' four pillars of agency and subsequently the development of the working class women's labour movement from below.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Russell and H.S. Lewis, *The Jew in London: a study of racial character and present-day conditions; being two essays prepared for the Toynbee trustees* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900).

By the 1880s, poverty had increased and women workers, to coin Orr et al, were no longer coping. In survival mode they resorted to challenging their employers with industrial strikes and the state with political militancy through the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). As the SDF called for agitation against class privilege, its founder, Henry Mayer Hyndman, relied upon separate spheres ideology to galvanize its largely male membership. Amie Hicks' feminism clearly countered Hyndman's anti-feminism. The more participative meetings organised by the politically militant, such as the SDF or the Amalgamated Society of Tailors took place in pubs and coffee houses or at open-air venues. The Fabian Society, in reaction to the SDF, developed its own ideas of patriarchal capitalism. The SDF, the Fabian Society and Toynbee Hall became part of the assemblage through which women workers developed their materialist agency and conduits for their voices. In 1888, the tide turned as working women, of their own volition, politicized their bodies in militant demonstrations and new unionism as they highlighted class difference as the root cause of their poverty. The Women's Trade Union Association provided working women with another conduit for their agency.

By this point, working women had learned through the generations to strike, unionize and demonstrate at short notice. They had become politically savvy in their inclusion of all workers, including homeworkers, in their campaigns. Trade unionism taught women workers the importance of documenting their working conditions as evidence and recognizing their industrial skills. The biographies of women trade union representatives clearly show cross class alliances, but by the 1890s, class conflict was splitting the labour movement. As news of working class women's agency percolated through East London and across the country so the labour movement evolved. Overtime, middle class platforms rebuilt themselves. Paterson's equal rights vision was reorientated by Dilke's social materialist feminist stance. The middle classes developed platforms in response to each other's middle class politics. For example, the Women's Employment Defence League refuted the middle class demands for "men's legislation", just as the Barmaid's Political Defence League formed to counteract the Joint Committee on Employment of Barmaids.

As the middle-class women's labour movement fractured in its ideas of protective legislation, working-class activists expressed themselves through its

different platforms as they embedded their political-feminist way of life. As Whyte argued against protective legislation through the Women's Employment Defence League, Hicks argued for it through the Women's Trade Union Association and the Women's Industrial Council, but she also held class legislation responsible for workers' poverty. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies endeavoured to involve these diverse platforms in their suffrage campaigns. These platforms could not have had the political momentum they had without the corporeal presence of women workers. Many in the labour movement were intimidated by emboldened women workers' class agency threatening their class privilege. As Beatrice Webb developed social maternalist feminism, she justified constraining women workers' agency by their biology as she lobbied for legislation to protect working-class women in their homes. Lady Dilke reduced women workers' representation at the Trade Union Congress. Although Dilke's and Webb's use of separate spheres ideological rhetoric limited working women's lives, many working women supported their campaigns, which came to form the basis of women and children's social welfare.

Industrial experience politicized and broadened workers' political outlook. Workers own histories of immigration and migration to London and their use of imported raw materials informed workers' understanding of the world's connectivity and global geopolitics. They identified themselves as part of an international class of exploited workers in the British Empire's colonial slop trades. By the end of the century, the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) had evidently recognized the same link as they developed philanthropic international women's organizations. It was in this complex political assemblage of ideas that sweated womanhood conflicted with class privilege. As working women further embedded their political-feminist way of life, they endeavoured to even up their political autonomy as they entrenched class as a political category. Amie Hicks proudly called herself a working woman and mother of workers to give herself the authority to speak in opposition to capitalism and validate her greater right to speak for women workers.<sup>4</sup> Working-class attendees of middle-class clubs may have absorbed middle-class ideas, but they were not necessarily passively moulded within them.

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<sup>4</sup> "Labour Commission," *Belfast Newsletter*, Wednesday December 2 1891

By 1906, working women's industrial experience had remoulded women workers selfhoods from those of the bible makers in the 1840s. Although many were still participating in middle-class platforms, women workers were organizing themselves and corporeally demonstrating against their exploitation whilst promoting their industrial skills through exhibitions. The broad middle-class labour movement was recognizing the power of women workers' agency. As the League increased its support for women's trade unionism through the National Federation of Women Workers, the Labour Party's Women's Labour League (WLL) supported women trade unionists as it encouraged them to lobby for women's suffrage to increase women's parliamentary power. Although working women involved themselves in the National Anti-Sweating League (NASL) and the Homeworkers League's campaigns for the minimum wage, they resented registering their homes and their participation diminished. Although the campaign for the minimum wage protected some women's wages, the majority of women workers' wages remained sweated.

The effort that women workers had to make to manifest their agency to challenge their employers and the state cannot be underestimated. The middle- and upper-class labour movement's leadership was accustomed to enacting agency through class privilege and economic security. They assumed, not just their right to speak, but also to give orders and be listened to. They did not require the volition of Mary Zugg, or even that of the box maker trade union organizer, Mrs Clem Edwards, nor did they face penalization when they criticized the state, or an employer. What becomes clear is that the middle class were mostly listened to by the middle class. It was only when the likes of Mrs Edwards mobilized others like herself into trade unions for their own protection that recognizable historical influential points of working women's mass agency occurred. Increasingly working-class women became more outspoken as they sought state power through suffrage, local politics and government.

As Melvina Walker stated, women workers would not be constrained from speaking for themselves by their lack of education or pacified by the Ministry of Health's visitors who told them how to survive on their pittance of a wage. Walker clarified working women's desire to share their collective experience and create political strategy. While some permanent meaningful connections were made

between some middle-class and working-class women, class difference explains why some working-class activists turned away from the Socialist movement as its leadership's class privilege and positionality prohibited the absolute equality of rights of all men and women. It is also understandable that many workers aspired to individual Tory affluence as opposed to remaining in the poverty of their community. Just as Emma Paterson, Edith Simcox and Beatrice Webb's political feminist standpoints differed, so did those of the working-class secretaries and the "rank and file" of the labour movement.

This prosopography supports the ideas of the formation of middle-class social maternalist and equal rights feminisms. To some degree, driven by the philanthropist experience, social maternalist feminism bound class privilege into perceptions of working-class women's industrial lives and working-class womanhood. Although working-class women developed their own ideas of feminist citizenship through equal rights feminism, it is difficult to assess their take-up of social maternalist feminism. Working-class women's organization of social welfare was a mechanism to ameliorate social injustice. Their ideas of social welfare did not return working women to the home. Perhaps women workers recognized that this was not a realistic possibility. There is still not enough uncovered evidence of working-class women's words, aspirations, allegiances and alliances to completely understand and define working women's feminism for this period. Although, by 1914, many working-class men supported women's feminist politics, the continuance of anti-feminism was just another dimension in East London's assemblage of complex intersectionality.

As women workers negotiated the patriarchal state's reliance on anti-feminist rhetoric, they recognized their industrial power as the state depended upon their labour. This reliance ensured not just women's permanence in the labour force but also their economic significance to the nation. The state could no longer avoid speaking directly to women workers. The women's proximity to the Houses of Parliament saw their actions reported in newspapers across the country and to the international class of workers. As they developed their irrepressible working-class feminist citizenship, they were creating their own feminist history from below.

This analysis of industrial working women's lives, 1840-1914, has highlighted how workers' experience in metropole East London related to working lives in the colonial peripheries. It would therefore be useful to compare the women workers' positionalities and agencies in the peripheries with those in the metropole. This thesis also highlights that further new research is required to unpick how women, men, girls and boys gendered lives interacted in East London's labour geographies. This framework could be reused to unpick agencies through intersectional assemblages in other geographies and help develop a national labour history. When exploring the reported activist names, many appeared to be from middle-class backgrounds. Given that many of the middle classes were forced to undertake industrial work, it would be useful to investigate the intersection of class in the labour force further.

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## Appendix 1: 'Song for a shirt' by Thomas Hood

With fingers weary and worn,  
With eyelids heavy and red,  
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,  
Plying her needle and thread —  
Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch  
She sang the "Song of the Shirt."

"Work! work! work!  
While the cock is crowing aloof!           10  
And work — work — work,  
Till the stars shine through the roof!  
It's Oh! to be a slave  
Along with the barbarous Turk,  
Where woman has never a soul to save,  
If this is Christian work!

"Work — work — work,  
Till the brain begins to swim;  
Work — work — work,  
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!  
Seam, and gusset,                           20  
Band, and gusset, and seam,  
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,  
And sew them on in a dream!

"Oh, Men, with Sisters dear!  
Oh, men, with Mothers and Wives!  
It is not linen you're wearing out,  
But human creatures' lives!  
Stitch — stitch — stitch,  
In poverty, hunger and dirt,           30  
Sewing at once, with a double thread,  
A Shroud as well as a Shirt.

"But why do I talk of Death?  
That Phantom of grisly bone,  
I hardly fear its terrible shape,  
It seems so like my own —  
It seems so like my own,  
Because of the fasts I keep;  
Oh, God! that bread should be so dear  
And flesh and blood so cheap!           40



Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch, —  
Would that its tone could reach the Rich! —  
She sang this "Song of the Shirt!"

(First published in *Punch, or the London Charivari*, December 16 1843)

## **Appendix 2: State intervention in the form of inquiries and protective legislation: a selective list**

1842/1843 Report for the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children exposed children and women working in mines, questioned women undertaking “masculine” work and classified women as children as it urged that women be prohibited from working underground.

1844 Factory Act limited daily working hours in factories to 12 hours.

1847 Factory Act reduced daily working hours to ten hours.

1856 Married Women’s Property Rights Bill led by Barbara Leigh Smith (later Bodichon).

1864 Children’s Employment Commission advocated needlewomen’s trade unions.

1864, 1866 Contagious Diseases Act.

1866 J.S. Mill lobbied for women’s right to vote.

1867 Reform Act which failed include women’s right to vote.

1867 Royal Commission on Trade Unions established the legal status of trade unions in the United Kingdom.

1870 Elementary Education Act, which served to train girls in household management and boys breadwinning skills.

1870 Married Women’s Property Act designed to protect the earning of working-class women and was linked to the wife beating debate and separation and maintenance legislation of the later 1870s.

1871 Trade Union Act.

In 1874 Mr Cross’s Factories (Health of Women) Bill carried its second reading which limited the number of hours children and women worked in textile industries to 56½ hours per week.

1874, 1878 Factory Acts reduced women’s work from 60 to 54 hours.

1884-5 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes.

1887 The Truck Act gave the Factory Inspectorate the power to enforce the 1831 Truck Act 1831, and the Truck Act 1896 made fines and deductions illegal unless set up by definite agreement or contract.

1887-88 Select Committee of the House of Lords on Sweating System.

1888 House of Lords Select Committee on sweating.

1988 Select Poor Relief and Immigration.

1891 Fair Wages Resolution.