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A Poor Woman's Lawyer? Feminism, the labour movement, and working-class women's access to the law in England, 1890-1935

Kate Bradley and Sophie Rowland

Women were excluded from both branches of the legal profession before the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act 1919. Whilst campaigning for women's entry to the law was an end in itself, it was also part of wider efforts to make the law more accessible to all. Before and after the 1919 Act, middle- and upper-class women were able to offer legal advice and case work to working-class women, by making use of both feminist and trade unionist networks and the professions that were open to them – factory inspection and social work. Through examination of the work of the Women's Industrial Council, the Women's Trade Union League and the Young Women's Christian Association between the 1890s and 1930s, we trace the development of work to both educate women and girls on their legal rights and to directly tackle problems and breaches of the law. We argue that, by looking at the legal activism of women in the factory inspectorate, social work, trade union and women's organisations, fresh insight into the development and 'mainstreaming' of working-class claims on citizenship in the early twentieth century can be found.

Keywords: legal advice; feminism; feminist law; trade unions; legal activism; citizenship; social work; lawyers; factory inspectors; class.

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Introduction

The Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act 1919 sought to open up public life to women, by preventing being a woman (or a married woman) as serving as a disqualification for entry to the professions and incorporated societies, undertaking any public functions, being appointed to a public role (such as the magistracy), and eligibility for jury service.¹ Women's equality

¹ See Anne Logan, 'In Search of Equal Citizenship: the campaign for women magistrates in England and Wales, 1910–1939,' *Women's History Review* 16, no. 4 (2007); Mari Takayanagi, 'Sacred year or broken reed? The Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act 1919,' *Women's History Review*, (2019), DOI: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2019.1702782>; Pat Thane, 'Afterword: Challenging women in the British professions,' *Women's History Review*, (2019), DOI: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2019.1702793>.

of access to public life was central to conceptualisations of the ‘new woman’ from the 1870s, and to the campaigns for women’s suffrage and other areas in which women were denied or restricted access, such as education and medicine.² In terms of campaigning, this was not simply about allowing middle-class women the same opportunities as their male peers. It was critical for reducing the injustices experienced by women of all backgrounds. As Logan notes, by the end of the nineteenth century, feminist campaigners in the criminal justice arena were alive to the ways in which the criminal justice system disadvantaged women as victims, witnesses, and defendants or inmates. Women’s professional presence in the criminal justice system would allow women’s complaints to be taken seriously, and for the safeguarding of those in custody.³ For similar reasons, there were calls for women to be involved in areas of civil justice and public administration, such as factory inspection.⁴ Obstructing women’s professional work did not prevent feminist activists from trying to tackle these injustices through professional makeshifts: educating women and girls about their rights and the law, and, before the 1920s, offering access to advice by volunteer male lawyers or women with legal knowledge. Numerous groups offered these makeshifts in response to their members’ needs, rather than there being one overarching, national scheme for legal advice and education for women. Women’s displacement from the legal profession and the resulting makeshifts also reveal how deeply inaccessible professions could be to their clients, and what benefits could be achieved by taking a different approach to reaching people in need.

Both branches of the English and Welsh legal profession – solicitors and barristers – resisted women’s entry before and after the Act. This resistance arose despite women’s admittance to university law programmes and work as ‘paralegals’ in relatives’ firms, as well as such legal challenges as Bertha Cave’s appeal to the House of Lords when her application

² See, for example: Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984), June Purvis, ed. *Women’s History: Britain 1850-1945* (London: Routledge, 1995), June Purvis, *Votes for Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), Ann Oakley, *Women, Peace and Welfare: A Suppressed History of Social Reform, 1880-1920* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), J.F. Geddes. ‘The doctors’ dilemma: Medical women and the British suffrage movement’ *Women’s History Review* 18, no. 2 (2009), Linda Martz, “‘That splendid body of women’”: Nursing, professional registration, and suffragette militancy’ *Women’s History Review*, 2019, DOI: <https://www-tandfonline-com/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2020.1745404>

³ Anne Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice: A Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 10-15.

⁴ Ruth Livesey, ‘The politics of work: feminism, professionalisation and women inspectors of factories and workshops,’ *Women’s History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004)

to join the Bar at Gray's Inn was rejected, and the test case of *Bebb v Law Society* [1914] 1 Ch 286, which sought to admit women as solicitors.⁵ Chrystal Macmillan demonstrated her skill in presenting a legal case during the Women Graduates of the Scottish Universities (Parliamentary) Committee's 1906 bid to extend the franchise to women graduates of Scottish universities. Macmillan later became one of the first women barristers.⁶ She also served as a legal advisor to a number of women's organisations, and a devoted campaigner on women's issues.⁷ Eliza Orme completed a law degree and established a conveyancing practice in the City of London, allowing her to work on the profession's fringes.⁸ The Committee for the Admission of Women to the Legal Profession was a central point for campaigning efforts.⁹ The growth of 'Poor Man's Lawyer' volunteering by male lawyers offering advice for free and action at very low cost from the 1890s was one means for working-class people to access advice and support. The Poor Man's Lawyer network also offered support to the women's trade union movement and feminist groups – and a route for some of the first women lawyers to gain a foothold in the profession.¹⁰ All of this activism was intended, at the grassroots, to alleviate individual suffering; but it was also aimed at shoring up the rights that women had secured as workers and, increasingly, as citizens. This activism was also part of the wider effort to make legal and other types of advice as

⁵ Patrick Polden, 'Portia's progress: Women at the Bar in England, 1919-1939,' *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 12, no. 3 (2005); Mary Jane Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers: A Comparative Study of Gender, the Law and the Legal Professions* (London: Hart, 2006); Eleni Skordaki, 'Glass slippers and glass ceilings: women in the legal profession,' *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 3, no. 1/2 (1996); Rosemary Auchmucty, 'Whatever happened to Miss Bebb? Bebb v The Law Society and women's legal history,' *Legal Studies* 31, no. 2 (2011), *Bebb v Law Society* [1914] 1 Ch 286.

⁶ Sybil Oldfield, 'Macmillan, (Jessie) Chrystal (1872-1937)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 – hereafter *ODNB*).

⁷ Helen Kay and Rose Pipes, 'Chrystal Macmillan, Scottish campaigner for women's equality through law reform,' *Women's History Review*, 2019, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2019.1702790>.

⁸ Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers*; Fiona M. Kay, 'The Social Significance of the World's First Women Lawyers,' *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 45, no. 2 (2007): 404; Leslie Howsam, "'Sound-minded women": Eliza Orme and the Study and Practice of the Law in Late-Victorian England,' *Atlantis* 15, no.1 (1989).

⁹ Judith Bourne, *Helena Normanton and the Opening of the Bar to Women* (Hook: Waterside, 2016), 53-5.

¹⁰ Tamara Goriely, 'Gratuitous assistance to the 'ill-dressed': debating civil legal aid in England and Wales from 1914-1939,' *International Journal of the Legal Profession* 13, no. 1 (2006), 52-4; on women lawyers and the Poor Man's Lawyer, see for example, Elizabeth Cruickshank and Carrie De Silva, 'Morrison [*Married Name* Appelbe] Carrie (1888-1950', *ODNB*, 2018.

accessible to working-class people.¹¹ Therefore, both to contemporaries and subsequently to historians, a lack of women lawyers was a threat to justice.

As Pepitone asserts, research on the first women lawyers has been scarce in comparison to that on women in medicine or the clergy.¹² Biographical approaches have yielded considerable insight into the individual women who sought entry into the legal profession in the early twentieth century. Mossman used this approach in her comparative study of early women lawyers in North America, Britain, New Zealand, India and Belgium.¹³ Bourne has worked extensively on Helena Normanton, the first woman barrister, and has also collaborated with other historians on uncovering individual women's attempts to enter the legal profession in the run-up to the centenary of the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act 1919.¹⁴ Whilst our understanding of women's experiences as individual members of a profession in the first half of the twentieth century is growing, there remains a gap in looking at the impact of their engagement in wider activist networks. Many of the first women lawyers were involved in *pro bono* legal work, either through their values as feminist activists or as a means of building up their reputation and contacts.¹⁵ The history of the Poor Man's Lawyer movement and legal aid reform has not received much attention from either historians or socio-legal researchers, and existing studies have not fully interrogated women's work in this area. However, this is not a deliberate omission, but a reflection of how resolutely male-dominated the Lord Chancellor's Office and Law Society remained up to the

¹¹ See Oliver Blaiklock, 'Advising the citizen: Citizens Advice Bureaux, voluntarism and the welfare state in England, 1938-1964' (PhD Kings College London, 2012); Judith Citron, *Citizens Advice Bureaux: For the Community, By the Community* (London: Pluto, 1990); Jean Richards, *Inform, Advise and Support: 50 Years of the Citizens Advice Bureau* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1989); Margaret Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action: A History of the National Council of Social Service, 1919-1969* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1969).

¹² Ren Pepitone, 'Gender, Space, and Ritual: Women Barristers, the Inns of Court, and the Interwar Press,' *Journal of Women's History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 61.

¹³ Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers*.

¹⁴ Bourne, *Helena Normanton and the Opening of the Bar to Women*, Bourne and Caroline Morris, 'Introducing Challenging Women', *Women's History Review*, (2019), doi:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2019.1702779>. See also 'First Women Lawyers in Great Britain and the Empire Symposia' at St Mary's University, <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/news/2016/08/first-women-lawyers-great-britain-empire-symposia-st-marys>.

Correct 2 March 2020.

¹⁵ See, for example: Elizabeth Cruickshank and Carrie De Silva, 'Morrison [*married name* Appelbe] Carrie (1888-1950),' *ODNB* (2018), ; Elizabeth B. Cruickshank, 'Berthen, Edith Annie Jones (1877-1951), solicitor,' *ODNB* (2018).

Second World War.¹⁶ Goriely's work in particular looks at the impact of feminist campaigns on forcing the Lord Chancellor's Office to appoint the two Finlay Committees to review both civil and criminal legal aid provision from April 1925.¹⁷ Further to this pressure, both Finlay Committees included one woman, Dorothy Jewson, who had served as a Labour MP between 1923-24, but otherwise we are reminded of women's near-exclusion from decision-making about access to advice and aid on the laws that affected their wellbeing.¹⁸

This brings us to the question of the trade unions and their engagement with legal services. Trade unions began offering legal services to their members in the later nineteenth century, as part of their mutual aid offer – if little attention to date has been paid to this aspect of their work.¹⁹ Similarly, historical work on women's trade unionism focussed on campaigning and networking, not their mutual schemes.²⁰ There is a well-established body of historical work on the women factory inspectors, which has largely engaged with their impact in terms of health and wellbeing at work, as well as women's presence in the professions.²¹ From 1895, the first women factory inspectors were, exactly like their male counterparts, endowed with magistrate powers – some twenty years before the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act 1919 allowed women to become magistrates.²² Legal initiatives undertaken by activists in the women's trade union movement and the wider

¹⁶ Richard I. Morgan, 'The Introduction of Civil Legal Aid in England and Wales, 1914-1949,' *Twentieth Century British History* 5, no. 1 (1994); Goriely, 'Gratuitous assistance'.

¹⁷ Goriely, 'Gratuitous assistance,' 53-4.

¹⁸ June Hannam, 'Jewson, Dorothea [Dorothy] (1884-1964),' *ODNB*, (2004). *Committee on Legal Aid for the Poor: Final Report*, Cmd. 3016 (London: HMSO, 1928), 2.

¹⁹ Geoff Latta and Roy Lewis, 'Trade Union Legal Services,' *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 12, no. 1 (1974).

²⁰ Sheila Lewenhak, *Women and trade unions: an outline history of women in the British trade union movement* (London: Benn, 1977); Geraldine Healy and Gill Kirton, 'Women, Power and Trade Union Government in the UK,' *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 38, no. 3 (2000).

²¹ Barbara Harrison and Melanie Nolan, 'Reflections in colonial glass? women factory inspectors in Britain and New Zealand 1893-1921,' *Women's History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004); Helen Jones, 'Women Health Workers: The Case of the First Women Factory Inspectors in Britain,' *Social History of Medicine* 1, no. 2 (1988); Mary Drake McFeely, *Lady Inspectors: The Campaign for a Better Workplace, 1893-1921* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Vicky Long, *The Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory: The Politics of Industrial Health in Britain, 1914-1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Christine Wheeldon, 'Pioneers in the 'corridors of power': Women civil servants at the Board of Trade and the Factory Inspectorate, 1893-1919' (PhD Goldsmiths, University of London, 2015); Livesey, 'The politics of work'; Hilary Marland and Vicky Long, 'From Danger and Motherhood to Health and Beauty: Health Advice for the Factory Girl in Early Twentieth-Century Britain,' *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 4 (2009).

²² Jones, 'Women Health Workers', 175-6. 'A Brief History of the Factory Inspectorate', *HM Chief Inspector of Factories, Annual Report 1974*, Cmnd. 6322 (London: HMSO, 1975), p.104

women's movement have attracted little attention, aside from Steinmetz's consideration of the Industrial Law Committee.²³ The legal work of the women factory inspectors, and its place within the wider picture of feminist and trade union activism, needs further scrutiny. Both before and after 1919, women's legal activism formed an element of the professional work of women factory inspectors and social workers, as well as those in the law. It was not necessarily central to the day-to-day work of those professions, which may explain its relative absence in the literature. However, whilst it was not the main focus of social workers' or factory inspectors' efforts, it was a powerful and important aspect of their work in relation to their concepts of feminism and industrial citizenship, as will now be seen.

I.

We will now consider the wider context of the 1890s, and how the idea that the law needed to be accessible to all crystallised during this decade. In 1891, General William Booth of the Salvation Army called for a 'Poor Man's Tribune' in *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, his exposé of poverty in London.²⁴ Booth believed people suffered unnecessarily through having access neither to the finances to pay for a solicitor nor to the social connections that could yield informal legal advice. Frank Tillyard, then a junior barrister resident at Mansfield House University Settlement in East London, took Booth's idea and operationalised it as the 'Poor Man's Lawyer'.²⁵ Tillyard spent an evening each week giving legal advice for free to anyone who came to the settlement; he was later joined by Arthur Blott, a local solicitor.²⁶

Tillyard's model of *pro bono* volunteering spread across the settlement movement, and then through churches, missions, and other community groups.²⁷ As the 1920s and 1930s progressed, advice – legal or otherwise – gained traction with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and its constituent members as a means of ensuring better outcomes for

²³ Willibald Steinmetz, *Begegnungen vor Gericht: eine Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des englischen Arbeitsrechts (1850-1925)* (München: Oldenbourg, 2002).

²⁴ William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: International Headquarters, 1890), 255-62.

²⁵ 'The Poor Man's Lawyer', *Northampton Mercury*, 6 September 1912, p.6.

²⁶ Arthur Blott, *Legal Dispensaries: An Account of the Poor Man's Lawyer Movement*, 2nd ed. (London: Avenue Press, 1911), 2.

²⁷ For accounts of the growth of the movement, see J. Mervyn Jones, *Free Legal Advice in England and Wales* (Oxford: Slatter and Rose, 1940); Blott, *Legal Dispensaries*.

working-class communities, and advice and guidance on rights increasingly formed part of the public service broadcasting of the BBC in the 1930s.²⁸ This in turn reflected the growing influence from the mid-nineteenth century of John Stuart Mills' view that education in civic matters was critical for preparing the working-classes and women for the vote.²⁹

Poor Man's Lawyer evenings located professional men's work on behalf of working-class people as something done in their leisure time as a form of public service, not as integral to their working lives. Tillyard did not follow this model. In 1908, he became a legal academic at the University of Birmingham. Tillyard combined teaching commercial law with training social workers through the University's new diploma in social work and the Birmingham University Settlement.³⁰

Tillyard also published books for social workers on aspects of the law from the 1890s, for the National Union of Women Workers. Initially published as *Hints for District Visitors: Legal Difficulties of the Poor*, and later as *Legal Hints for Social Workers*, the books ran to four editions by 1916.³¹ Social workers – at this point either volunteers or paid staff of charities or churches, and broadly understood to include club workers, and who were usually women – could be a first port of call for families in any kind of legal difficulty, and therefore were an important source of guidance. With the growth of welfare legislation and agencies such as the juvenile courts, social workers would have an increasingly important role in the twentieth century both in implementing legislation and in helping families navigate the laws that affected them.³² Social work was a socially acceptable route for middle-class women's activities outside of the home.³³ It was also a conduit for accessing advice and help with problems.

²⁸ Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 71-82.

²⁹ Derek Heater, *Citizenship in Britain: A History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 113-7.

³⁰ Jon Glasby, *Poverty and Opportunity: One Hundred Years of the Birmingham Settlement* (Studley: Brewin, 1999, 1999), 47-8, 109; Joyce Rimmer, *Troubles Shared: The Story of a Settlement 1899-1979* (Birmingham: Phlogiston, 1980), 49-50.

³¹ Frank Tillyard, *Hints for District Visitors: Legal Difficulties of the Poor* (London: National Union of Women Workers, 1898); Frank Tillyard and F.H. Hamnett, *Legal Hints for Social Workers*, Fourth ed. (London: National Union of Women Workers, 1916).

³² See, for example, Kathleen Woodroffe, *From Charity to Social Work in England and the United States* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

³³ See Martha Vicinus, (ed). *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (London: Methuen, 1977), Seth Koven, 'Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840-1914' In *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, edited by Seth Koven and

To an extent, the ‘social workers’ of the later nineteenth century followed the model created by the Factory Inspectorate in terms of taking on elements of legal work. The Factory Inspectorate was established following the Factory Act 1833 to ensure new restrictions on child employment and educational requirements were adhered to. Initially, a group of four male inspectors examined around 3,000 textile mills. They had considerable powers, from being able to enter the mills and question staff, to enforcing the application of the Act through making regulations and orders, and prosecuting errant employers. As Bartrip notes, as with several other governmental inspectorates, like mining, factory inspectors had magistrate-like powers. They were able to both make and enforce the law, from being consulted on the development of Factory Bills, to fining employers on the spot for breaches of the law.³⁴ Magistrates or Justices of the Peace were lay members of the public who occupied an important space in the legal world of the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, the range of minor criminal cases that could be dealt with summarily in their courts increased. They also dealt with civil matters, such as licensing public houses, though local government progressively absorbed many of these responsibilities.³⁵

As Logan notes, the campaign for women magistrates emerged in 1910, following the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the selection of Justices of the Peace that no changes be made. Women therefore remained excluded from this area of voluntary work.³⁶ However, factory inspection offered a means of intervening in a system which involved women and children. The Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women and the Women’s Protective and Provident League campaigned for female factory inspectors from the late 1870s.³⁷ As Livesey notes, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called for women factory inspectors from working-class backgrounds, but the role was eventually created for elite women with philanthropic experience. For example, Hilda Martindale, who became a

Sonya Michel, 94-135 (New York: Routledge, 1993), 94-135; Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Edward Elgar, 1991).

³⁴ P.W.J. Bartrip, ‘British Government Inspection, 1832-1875’, *Historical Journal*, 25, no.3, (1982), 606, 612.

³⁵ Logan, ‘In Search of Equal Citizenship,’ 504. Sir Thomas Skyrme, *History of the Justices of the Peace, England 1689-1989*, vol. Two (Chichester: Barry Rose, 1991), 186.

³⁶ Logan, ‘In Search of Equal Citizenship,’ 504-5.

³⁷ Livesey, ‘The politics of work,’ 233.

factory inspector in 1901, was deemed qualified through her work for Dr Barnardo's.³⁸ The women factory inspectors constituted a small discrete team within the Factory Inspectorate lasted until 1921, when they were incorporated into the Inspectorate's geographical and sector-based teams.³⁹ This was part of the broader integration of women and men in the Civil Service, of which the Factory Inspectorate was part, and also of 'mainstreaming' women's groups within the trade union movement.⁴⁰

A critical factor in successfully tackling poor workplace conditions was women's own knowledge of their rights and their employers' responsibilities, and empowering them to instigate action. As Parker observes, ideas about work and citizenship had been yoked together since the late eighteenth century, first through Robert Owen's initiatives, and later through the Fabians' concerns about upholding the rights of workers in a modern industrial state.⁴¹ There were various groups who tackled the question of working women's participation, working to different agendas.

Originally known as the Women's Protective and Provident League in 1874, the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was not a trade union in itself, but sought to encourage women's participation in unions and to secure their rights.⁴² Its legal department took on cases, with advice either given by their secretary or passed on to a panel of solicitors.⁴³ The Women's Industrial Council (WIC) was founded as the Women's Trade Union Association in 1889, and aimed to organise women workers in East London. Its reformation in 1894 as the Women's Industrial Council (WIC) led to a change of focus on to researching women's working conditions and campaigning for better rights for women.⁴⁴ The Industrial Law Committee (ILC) was founded in 1898 to improve workers'

³⁸ Ibid., 246.

³⁹ Ibid., 254; McFeely, *Lady Inspectors*, 153-63.

⁴⁰ Wheeldon, 'Pioneers in the 'corridors of power'', Gladys Boone, *The Women's Trade Union Leagues in Great Britain and the United States of America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 40.

⁴¹ Julia Parker, *Citizenship, Work and Welfare: Searching for the Good Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 59-166.

⁴² Boone, *The Women's Trade Union Leagues*, 20-21.

⁴³ Katherine Graves Busbey, 'The Women's Trade Union Movement in Great Britain,' *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* XIX, no. 83 (1909): 23, 33.

⁴⁴ Ellen Mappen, *Helping Women at Work: The Women's Industrial Council, 1889-1914* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 12-3.

understanding of industrial law. It offered free legal advice, along with investigating conditions, and campaigning to change the law.⁴⁵

The ILC was also a response to calls from social workers for better information on industrial legislation, as they encountered workers who were not aware of their rights. Its function was to educate school teachers, health workers and district visitors to better advise the people they came into contact with. The ILC achieved this by giving lectures, some by factory inspectors, but also through a triage service that put advice seekers in touch with people who could help them.⁴⁶ May Abraham, one of the first female factory inspectors, became the ILC chair after she gave up paid work following her marriage to Jack Tennant, a Liberal Party politician.⁴⁷ Her former colleagues valued the work highly: for example, Adelaide Anderson strongly endorsed the work of both the ILC and the WIC in promoting understanding of the Factory Acts.⁴⁸ Co-operation between women factory inspectors, trades union activists, women's organisations and the early women lawyers was essential for raising awareness of rights and responsibilities, and bringing cases to official attention and action. Critically, the different groups offered a variety of ways and means for reaching girls and women who worked, often in industries or locations that were not easy to organise.

II.

We will now consider how these activist groups and networks attempted to deliver legal advice, and the role of early female lawyers and proto-lawyers within them. In terms of the wider trade union movement of which these groups were part, it was increasingly common by the early 1900s for trade unions to offer legal services to their members. Often, this involved the union contracting a firm of solicitors to do this work for them.⁴⁹ Some unions offered their own legal services, such as the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, which dealt with 358 cases in 1907. 240 cases were dealt with

⁴⁵ Busbey, 'The Women's Trade Union Movement in Great Britain. '; Patricia E. Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: A Social History, 1850-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ 'Industrial Law Committee', *Spectator*, 15 August 1908, 19.

⁴⁷ Serena Kelly, 'Tennant, Margery Mary Edith Josephine Pia (1869-1946),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ Jones, 'Women Health Workers,' 179-80.

⁴⁹ Latta and Lewis, 'Trade Union Legal Services.'

following advice by the union's legal department, with 31 being referred to solicitors. Other cases were withdrawn or otherwise satisfactorily settled.⁵⁰ Providing legal advice to women workers was not therefore out of line with the rest of the trade union movement; but using women proto-lawyers was an important innovation.

The Women's Industrial Council's honorary secretary, Richard Singleton Garnett, was a solicitor and would either handle the cases himself or pass them to another solicitor on their panel of volunteers.⁵¹ Garnett's role was later adopted by the WIC's Legal and Statistical Committee, as part of their wider remit of reviewing existing legislation and campaigning for improvements.⁵² From 1900, the WTUL's Working Women's Legal Advice Bureau was in operation. Cases were sent to Mona Wilson, the WTUL Secretary, who passed them to solicitors for advice or action.⁵³ They also made use of the London Poor Man's Lawyer network, forwarding cases to Arthur Blott.⁵⁴ In 1913, the Bureau took on the case of *Bebb v Law Society* [1914] 1 Ch 286. Maud Ingram (later Crofts) was involved with the Bureau from 1913, when she completed her studies at the University of Cambridge. Ingram joined Gwyneth Bebb, Nancy Nettlefold and Karin Costelloe in bringing the test case through the Bureau.⁵⁵ Growing up with a barrister father, Ingram developed both an interest in the law and a fervent antipathy towards women's exclusion from the franchise. Social work with women and children during the First World War heightened her sense of the injustices imposed on women under the law and their exclusion from the legal profession.⁵⁶ In 1914, Ingram wrote about how the Bureau demonstrated to her how working-class women were happier to reveal their problems to fellow women, and therefore of the urgent need for

⁵⁰ Busbey, 'The Women's Trade Union Movement in Great Britain,' 22-3.

⁵¹ See 'Mr R.S. Garnett', *The Times*, 26 July 1932, p.14. For example: 'Legal Cases, 1908', *Women's Industrial News*, Dec 1908, p.1.

⁵² Mappen, *Helping Women at Work*.

⁵³ Modern Records Centre (hereafter MRC), MSS.243.142 Part One Cases 1-179, e.g. case 37, 3 August 1900. See also Elaine Harrison, 'Wilson, Mona (1872-1954)', in *ODNB* (2008).

⁵⁴ MRC, MSS.243.142 Part One Cases 1-179, case 38, 23 7 July 1900.

⁵⁵ 'Women and the Law', *Common Cause*, 7 November 1913, p.539. Also Judith Bourne, 'Gwyneth Bebb: the past explaining the present', *Law Gazette*, <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/gwyneth-bebb-the-past-explaining-the-present/5070047.article>, 29 April 2019. Correct 4 November 2019.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Cruickshank, 'Maud Crofts', <https://first100years.org.uk/maud-crofts/>, 2016. Correct at 10 April 2020.

women to enter the legal profession.⁵⁷ Ingram was also a lecturer for the Industrial Law Committee.⁵⁸ After her formal entry to the legal profession in 1922 and marriage, she continued to work with feminist groups. Crofts' legal work for the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child and the Six Point Group has been documented, but she also served as one of the legal advisors to the YWCA and its Industrial Law Bureau.⁵⁹ She undertook this later work alongside John Stanley Chown, a Poor Man's Lawyer at Mansfield House.⁶⁰

Sophy Sanger, then a recent Cambridge graduate, took up the unpaid post of honorary secretary to the WTUL's bureau in 1903.⁶¹ Sanger's mother undertook philanthropic work, and her older brother, Charles, was involved in Liberal and Radical circles. At university, Sanger became involved in the Women's University Settlement Society.⁶² At the WTUL, Sanger threw herself into legal studies at University College London, whilst also learning industrial law from the women factory inspectors. Sanger was then able to undertake a considerable amount of legal advice work herself.⁶³ Her work at the WTUL encompassed both advising the Labour Party and labour movement on issues around legislation law, and working with women on a range of issues.⁶⁴ The WTUL and the Working Women's Legal Advice Bureau both operated until the early 1920s, when the WTUL became the Women's Section of the Trades Union Congress and the NFWW merged with the National Union of General Workers.

Following women's entry to the legal profession, the interwar period was marked by activism to try to improve working-class women's access to the law. As Morgan notes, the Lord Chancellor's Office and the legal profession made some effort, following the report of the Royal Commission on Divorce in 1912, to make divorce more accessible to people on modest incomes through the creation of Prescribed Officers to manage the 'Poor Persons'

⁵⁷ Maud Ingram, *Evening News*, 14 March 1914, 6.

⁵⁸ <https://celebratingthecentenaryofwomenlawyers.wordpress.com/maud-crofts/>. Correct 1 October 2019.

⁵⁹ 'The First Women Solicitors', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 December 1922, 11.

⁶⁰ Kate Faulkner, 'Cambridge Women and the Law,' *Legal Information Management* 19, no. 1 (2019).

⁶¹ MRC, MSS.243/50/1/8 Industrial Law Bureau Commission, Minutes 11 March 1935, 4.

⁶² Sybil Oldfield and M. C. Curthoys, 'Sanger, Sophy (1881-1950),' in *ODNB* (2006).

⁶³ A.M. Allen, *Sophy Sanger: A Pioneer in Internationalism* (Glasgow: Robert Maclehose, 1958), 1, 20-23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38, 42.

⁶⁵ Allen, *Sophy Sanger*, 42, 49, and 72.

Procedure. Under this procedure, potential cases were assessed for their legal merits, with the applicants being means-tested to check that they could not afford to pay. Cases which passed both tests were then passed to solicitors who did not receive any fees for their work.⁶⁵ However, the First World War had a major impact on this, through increased demand for divorce from couples whose relationships were strained by the war alongside a shortage of solicitors.⁶⁶ Trying to work out a means of facilitating divorce occupied a considerable amount of time in the 1920s, with the Lord Chancellor's Office setting up four committees to review legal aid for working-class people.⁶⁷ The two committees chaired by Justice Lawrence – which reported in 1919 and 1925 – were concerned with the mechanisms for handling divorce cases for 'poor persons'.

In the opinion of three prominent activists – Gertrude Tuckwell, Marion Phillips and Clara Rackham – these provisions did not go far enough to address the problems faced by working-class families.⁶⁸ Tuckwell began her working life as a teacher, but left to take on the role of labour secretary to her aunt, Lady Emilia Dilke, and became heavily involved with the WTUL. Lady Dilke was the second wife of Sir Charles Dilke, the Liberal politician, and the pair were heavily involved in radical political activism. Tuckwell was one of the first seven women to be appointed as a magistrate in 1919.⁶⁹ Phillips was the secretary of the Women Workers' League, and secretary of the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations, later the women's branch of the Labour Party.⁷⁰ Rackham also came from a family committed to social activism. She began her activist career by establishing a Co-operative Women's Guild branch and serving as a Poor Law Guardian in Cambridge. She was a factory inspector during the First World War, and became a Labour councillor on

⁶⁵ Morgan, 'Introduction of Civil Legal Aid', 42-3.

⁶⁶ *Committee to Enquire into the Poor Persons Rules* Cmd. 430, (London: HMSO, 1919); *Poor Persons' Rules Committee*, Cmd. 2358 (London: HMSO, 1925); *Committee on Legal Aid for the Poor – First Report*. Cmd. 2638 (London: HMSO, 1926); *Committee on Legal Aid for the Poor – Final Report*. Cmd. 2016 (London: HMSO, 1928).

⁶⁷ Morgan, 'Introduction of Civil Legal Aid', 47-8.

⁶⁸ See Goriely, 'Gratuitous Assistance'.

⁶⁹ Angela V. John, 'Tuckwell, Gertrude Mary (1861-1951),' *ODNB*, (2004), Hilary Fraser, 'Dilke, Emilia Francis, Lady Dilke', *ODNB*, (2004, 2008), Cathy Hunt, 'Gertrude Tuckwell and the British Labour Movement, 1891-1921: a study in motives and influences', *Women's History Review*, 22 (3) 2013.

⁷⁰ Brian Harrison, 'Phillips, Marion (1881-1932),' in *ODNB*, (2010).

Cambridge city council in 1920. Rackham was also one of the first female magistrates.⁷¹ Tuckwell, Phillips and Rackham galvanised a campaign for a review of legal aid for the poor on a range of matters, which was taken up by the National Council of Labour Women.

The ensuing pressure led to the Lord Chancellor's Office setting up the two Finlay Committees.⁷² The first of the Finlay committees examined provision in criminal cases, publishing their report in 1925; the second, published in 1928, reported on civil cases.⁷³ The second Finlay Report celebrated the work of volunteer lawyers in offering free legal advice, but frustrated campaigners who wanted to see more radical changes by recommending that legal aid and advice remained voluntary schemes in the hands of the Law Society.⁷⁴ Tuckwell, Phillips and Rackham's campaigning to try to better secure women's rights was ultimately lost in committees whose concerns were on the capacity of an almost exclusively male profession to handle divorce cases. Change in this regard would not happen until 1950s, following the partial implementation of the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949.⁷⁵ The advice services provided were a means of protecting women's rights in the short-term; the ongoing project was rather to improve access to the law in general.

III.

Having looked at activists and groups, we will now look at what these bureaux and committees had to offer, and how this changed over time. Between 1898 and 1910, the ILC dealt with 557 cases.⁷⁶ In the first three years of its operation, the ILC saw ten, fifteen, and then twenty-three cases respectively. From 1901, the ILC began to see on average forty cases each year, rising to around sixty by 1908. Whilst there was a consistent flow of cases coming in over these twelve years, it was mostly at the equivalent rate of one case per week. The vast majority of cases in this period – 341 or 61% – related to working conditions, such as poor ventilation or heating. A further 184 cases (33%) involved concerns about working

⁷¹ Brian Harrison, 'Rackham [née Tabor], Clara Dorothea (1875-1966),' *ODNB*, (2004).

⁷² Goriely, 'Gratuitous assistance', 53-54.

⁷³ *Committee on Legal Aid for the Poor. Final Report.*, Cmd. 3016, (London: HMSO, 1928).

⁷⁴ Goriely, 'Gratuitous assistance to the 'ill-dressed'', 57-8.

⁷⁵ See Morgan, 'The Introduction of Civil Legal Aid'.

⁷⁶ MRC, MSS 243/42 Part One: Register of Enquiries, Volume One; Part Two: Registers and Enquiries.

hours, particularly around limits on the number of hours expected and the times of day and night when minors could work. Of the remaining cases, thirteen were requests for help with poor living conditions. Five raised issues of workplace non-compliance with the Factory Acts (for example, not displaying the abstracts of the Acts at work as well as materially negligent behaviour or conditions). Five raised different types of complaint about their workplaces. Three sought help with family matters, such as willed money that relatives had refused to hand over. A handful of other cases were seen in this twelve-year period encompassed poor 'moral' conditions at work, a personal injury case, and a civil dispute. Largely, the ILC fulfilled a role in providing individualised information about the parameters of work, in terms of the physical working conditions young women could expect, along with the times that they should be in work. The vast majority of enquirers were referred through some sort of social worker or organisation: women's settlement houses, girls' club leaders, deaconesses, or the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Sometimes, cases came forward when an ILC lecturer gave a talk, as was the case when May Tennant spoke to the YWCA in Canterbury in 1901.⁷⁷ These queries were generated through contact that took place outside of the workplace, and where the young women felt that they could approach someone for help – be that a club leader or a visiting lecturer.

The YWCA were also involved in providing advice and casework. As Beaumont notes, the YWCA was set up in 1877 following the merger of various women's religious groups. It provided educational, moral and practical support to young working women, through the lens of Christian fellowship. The YWCA rapidly expanded both domestically and internationally in the late nineteenth century. Part of its domestic offer included setting up a Factory Helpers Union in 1886 to support young women at work at work, and a committee to monitor relevant legislation in terms of its scope and implementation.⁷⁸ The YWCA Social and Legislative Committee undertook similar casework to the ILC, seeing 362 cases between December 1919 and September 1923.⁷⁹ When the ILC was disbanded in

⁷⁷ MRC, MSS.243.142 Part One Cases 1-179, case 62, 1 April 1901.

⁷⁸ Caitriona Beaumont, 'Fighting for the 'Privileges of Citizenship': the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), feminism and the women's movement, 1928–1945,' *Women's History Review* 23, no. 3 (2014/05/04 2014): 466-7.

⁷⁹ MRC, MSS/243/45 Social and Legislation Division 1919-23, casebook

1920, its committee offered the YWCA a grant to take on the ILC's work, but on condition that the 'moral' work that the Social and Legislative Committee undertook was moved to a different YWCA committee. The Social and Legislative Committee would then be able to concentrate on dealing with industrial matters and to develop its work around insurance.⁸⁰ It offered friendly society benefits by operating as a branch of the Federation of Women Workers' Approved Society), and a health education campaign.⁸¹ Following the adoption of the ILC by the Social and Legislative Committee, the Committee was renamed the Industrial Law Bureau (ILB).

The ILB aimed to educate young working women about the laws that affected them; it also sought to collect evidence for campaigns to tackle emerging industrial problems; and to be a central hub for reporting concerns about workplaces.⁸² They undertook casework on any type of industrial law, mostly offering advice, but with the ability to escalate cases to legal advisors or the relevant public authority.⁸³ The ILB received 94 cases in 1922, 104 in 1923, 81 in 1924, and 72 in 1925. Whilst there was a decline in the total cases over the period, the types of cases that came to the ILB were consistent: cases that related to the Factory and Workshop, Master and Servant, and Shops Acts accounted for 53%, 56%, 62% and 47% of the ILB's work in each respective year. Cases relating to the Workmen's Compensation Acts accounted for around 6-10% of cases in this period, whilst the largest growth was in relation to National Insurance. National Insurance-related queries rose from 6% in 1922 to 19% by 1925.⁸⁴ The success of the ILC and its successor bodies in educating women and girls in their workers' rights is reflected in the accounts from the case files: for example, in the early 1920s women wrote to enquire about their new entitlements to maternity benefit when married.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ MRC, MSS/243/50/1/1, File re: Industrial Law Bureau, 'The Need for the Consideration and Re-Statement of the Functions of the Industrial Law Bureau and its Relation to other YWCA Committees', 26 August 1925, pp.1-3.

⁸¹ Cecil, Cecil M. Chapman and Constance Smith, 'Women in Industry', *The Times*, 12 November 1926, p.10.

⁸² MRC, MSS/243/50/1/1, File re: Industrial Law Bureau, pp.1-3.

⁸³ MRC, MSS/243/50/1/5 File re: Industrial Law Bureau, 'History and Development of the YWCA Industrial Law Bureau', p.2.

⁸⁴ MRC, MSS/243/49/3/9 YWCA Industrial Law Bureau, Statistics for Years 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1925.

⁸⁵ MRC, MSS. 243/45 - Social and Legislation Department: register of complaints. Mar 1919 - Sep 1923, Case 264 6.12.22

The link between the ILB and the Factory Inspectorate remained close. In 1924, Constance Smith took over as its Chair.⁸⁶ Smith developed a friendship with Gertrude Tuckwell and became immersed in the Dilkes' social circles from the 1890s, when her family moved to London. Smith first undertook social conditions research for the Christian Social Union, before getting involved with the WTUL. In 1904, Smith joined the British Section of the International Association for Labour Legislation, where she worked closely with Sophy Sanger, who was increasingly involved in international labour law from this point. Smith chaired the committee which represented women's interests in the preparation of the National Insurance Bill in 1911. She was appointed as Senior Lady Inspector of Factories in 1913, and promoted to Deputy Chief Inspector in 1921, as part of the reorganisation of the Factory Inspectorate. In 1925, Smith was forced to leave the Civil Service on age grounds, but continued to work with the ILB until shortly before her death in 1930.⁸⁷

According to Tuckwell, Smith was instrumental in shaping the ILB's policies, and 'brought [it] from an amateur atmosphere to a high level of authority'.⁸⁸ The bureau's remit widened over time, introducing first an Industrial Education Sub-Committee in 1928 and a Public Affairs Sub-Committee in 1933. The ILB also undertook research into problems that caught their attention, such as home workers making small goods for sale at carnivals, or they provided evidence to Parliamentary Select Committees, as in the case of shop assistants. The Public Affairs Committee took up some of this work, such as research with the National Council of Girls' Clubs into young people travelling on workmen's trains, or making recommendations for amendments to the Unemployment Bill.⁸⁹

The ILB Committee had a role in overseeing the bureau's work of the ILB as well as undertaking investigations. By the mid-1930s, this Committee was dominated by women who worked in social work and social research.⁹⁰ Eileen Younghusband was at the beginning

⁸⁶ MRC, MSS/243/50/1/5 File re: Industrial Law Bureau, 'History and Development of the YWCA Industrial Law Bureau', p.1.

⁸⁷ Gertrude Tuckwell, *Constance Smith: A Short Memoir* (London: Duckworth, 1931), 13-24, 27-8, 36, 40-2. See also Allen, *Sophy Sanger*,

⁸⁸ Tuckwell, *Constance Smith*, 42.

⁸⁹ MRC, MSS 243/49/3/2/1 ILB Commission (Spare copies), 'History and development of the YWCA Industrial Law Bureau', ca. 1934, pp.1-3.

⁹⁰ MRC, MSS.243/49/12/7, ILB Committee May-Oct 1935.

of her teaching career at the LSE, alongside voluntary social work in London and serving as a magistrate in Stepney.⁹¹ Jessie Agnes Kydd also taught at the LSE.⁹² Edith Ramsay was heavily involved in voluntary work in East London.⁹³ Cécile Matheson was nearing the end of a distinguished career in education, community work, social research, and social work training.⁹⁴ Nina Popplewell had been a suffragette, before going into care committee work and then working as an assistant secretary at the Trade Boards.⁹⁵ May Curwen was the YWCA's National General Secretary from 1930 to 1949, having previously been its Education Secretary.⁹⁶ Amicia Carroll was also a YWCA employee.⁹⁷ Miss Yelf, the YWCA general divisional secretary, was also on the committee, as was Lady Proctor, who was the National President of the YWCA.⁹⁸ Given her longstanding connection with the WTUL and the ILC, followed by her campaigning for the Finlay Committee on legal aid, Gertrude Tuckwell was, unsurprisingly, a member of the sub-committee. Mary Muirhead Paterson represented the Factory Inspectorate, along with Miss Carbutt.⁹⁹ Nora De Chaumont was a sanitary inspector in Kensington, and a long-standing member of the Industrial Law Committee from its earliest days, along with Tuckwell.¹⁰⁰ Margrieta Beer undertook research for the Board of Trade in the 1900s, before joining the Trades Boards in 1909. She had also worked with Sophy Sanger, during her work for the WTUL.¹⁰¹ In this way, the ILB drew

⁹¹ Kathleen Jones, *Eileen Younghusband: A Biography* (London: Bedford Square, 1984); 'Younghusband, Dame Eileen Louise (1902-1981),' *ODNB*, (2004).

⁹² Ann Oakley, *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014), 117.

⁹³ Bertha Sokoloff, *Edith and Stepney: 60 Years of Education, Politics and Social Change, the Life of Edith Ramsay* (London: Stepney Books, 1987).

⁹⁴ Georgina Brewis, 'Matheson, (Marie) Cécile (1874-1950),' *ODNB*, (2018).

⁹⁵ 'Fine Year's Work by Women's Council', *Eastbourne Herald*, 30 June 1956, p.12; Sue Tranter, 'Young girls of today are not active enough', *Daily Mirror*, 5 July 1978, p.9; also: Description of 'Papers of Nina Popplewell, c. 1950-1968. Women's Library Archives. GB 106 7POP' on the Archives Hub website, [https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb106-7pop], accessed 18 November 2019.

Library Archives, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/22ba0bdd-9623-3b7b-9555-66fad4534941>

⁹⁶ 'Dame May Curwen', *The Times*, 15 September 1973, 14.

⁹⁷ 'Juvenile workers', *Scotsman*, 2 July 1936, 8.

⁹⁸ 'The International Work of the YMCA', *Western Daily Press*, 27 April 1934, p.4. 'Chelmsford', *Essex County Chronicle*, 2 March 1917, 6.

⁹⁹ Helen Jones, 'Paterson, Mary Muirhead (1864-1941),' *ODNB* (2004); Janet M. Campbell, 'Appendix B (I). A Further Enquiry into the Health of Women Munition Workers', in US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Industrial Health Efficiency: Final Report of the British Health Munition Workers' Committee* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), p.269.

¹⁰⁰ Jennifer R. Haynes, 'Sanitary Ladies and Friendly Visitors: Women public health officers in London, 1890-1930' (PhD Institute of Education, University of London, 2006), 65, 97; 'Industrial Suffering', *St. James' Gazette*, 10 August 1900, p.6;

¹⁰¹ Dorothea Waley Singer, *Margrieta Beer, 1871-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1955), 19-29.

upon a wide range of expertise. Its broad membership also reflected the wide range of organisations that had a stake in industrial and social welfare – and women’s easy access to advice on their rights.

The ILB was run by its Secretary. In the early 1930s, Rosalind Chambers undertook this role. Chambers studied social science at the LSE in the 1920s, returning in 1933 to take her BSc (Econ), specialising in Industrial Law. Chambers combined this with working part-time at the ILB until April 1935, when she completed her degree and began teaching at the LSE.¹⁰² Chambers raised the question of dropping casework in 1933, in a confidential memorandum in response to financial pressures on the YWCA. Chambers felt that, originally, casework was a good thing in itself for the ILB to do. However, Chambers increasingly felt that the general context in which casework took place had changed. The training of social workers in general and on the law had improved, partly through the YWCA’s educational work. As a result, better advice was given on the spot to young women, and the social workers were also more confident in referring their clients directly to the factory inspectors without going through the ILB. Chambers felt that the Poor Man’s Lawyer and trade union legal services had improved. She was unhappy with the ILB’s own legal work, as cases were passed by the ILB’s honorary solicitor to a panel of solicitors of varying quality.¹⁰³ Chambers also felt that wider state infrastructure for supporting workers – such as the Employment Exchanges, and the growth of the Factory Inspectorate – also detracted from the need for the ILB.¹⁰⁴ Speaking to the YWCA’s Budget Sub-Committee in autumn 1934, Chambers argued that there had been a decline in the number of cases seen, as more cases went straight to the authorities as a result of the improved training of social workers and a growth other sources of legal advice.¹⁰⁵

There was not universal agreement that the ILB should abandon its casework. In December 1934, Tuckwell called for the ILB to take on *more* casework. To find a resolution

¹⁰² Christopher T. Husbands, *Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1904-2015. Sound and Fury* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 70-1.

¹⁰³ MRC, MSS 243/49/3/6/1 Written Evidence, ‘Confidential memorandum on case-work’, n.d.

¹⁰⁴ MRC, MSS.243/49/15/1, Written Evidence, Rosalind Chambers, ‘Confidential memorandum on case-work,’ 27 September 1934.

¹⁰⁵ MRC, MSS.243/49/7/1/3, ILB Commission, Letter RC Chambers to Miss S Carbutt, 28 November 1934

between the positions, the YWCA established an Industrial Law Commission to thoroughly review the ILB's work.¹⁰⁶ The Commission included various ILB committee members – Tuckwell, Popplewell, Anderson, and Carroll – along with a number of other senior figures in the YWCA, and a London YWCA club leader. For balance, three external members were appointed: Emily Slocock, a Factory Inspector; Miss Goddard, Secretary of the Bentham Society [sic]; and Constance Colwill, a barrister, to represent the Cases Sub-Committee.¹⁰⁷ The Commission heard or received evidence from Factory Inspectors, the London County Council, trade unions, and the Ministry of Health, as well as the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and the Central Council for the Welfare of Women and Girls in London.¹⁰⁸

In early 1935, Curwen sent a survey to YWCA local branches to ascertain what branch leaders thought about the extent of young women's knowledge of the law, and branches' use of the ILB.¹⁰⁹ The returned questionnaires could not present a definitive view of young women's knowledge of the law, as young women were not directly asked about what they knew. The replies suggested that there was no one 'world' of women's work. Several branches – Aberystwyth, Bromley, Cardiff, Chelsea, Croydon, Finchley and Harrow – pointed out how the majority of their members worked in domestic service. In some cases, such as rural and coastal Aberystwyth, opportunities to work in industry were very limited.¹¹⁰

In other places, concerns centred upon women in specific industries. In East Acton, most complaints about working conditions came from women working in laundries.¹¹¹ Places dominated by a particular employer could benefit from the approach taken in that factory. In Kendal, the K Boot Factory and a strong union presence resulted in both good

¹⁰⁶ MRC, MSS.243/49/7/1/1, ILB Commission, Letter RC Chambers to Curwen, 4 December 1934.

¹⁰⁷ MRC, MSS.243/49/7/2/2 ILB Commission, Letter Curwen (as National General Secretary) to Chambers, 12 February 1935. The Bentham Committee was established in 1929 by the London Council of Social Services and the London Poor Man's Lawyer Council. It supported those on low incomes with obtaining funds and the necessary legal expertise to take cases to court. Mervyn Jones, *Free Legal Advice*, 13. Anderson was responsible for Slocock earlier being appointed District Superintending Inspector in Leicester in 1922. McFeely, *Lady Inspectors*, 160.

¹⁰⁸ MRC, MSS.243/50/11/2 File re: Industrial Law Bureau, Report of the Industrial Law Bureau Commission for Consideration of the National Council and Executive of the YWCA, May 1935, 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/56, Replies from the Branches, 'Response to questionnaires sent to local centres in England'.

¹¹⁰ MRC, MSS.243/49/5, Replies from the Branches, 49/5/2 Aberystwyth, 49/5/5 Bromley, 49/5/7 Cardiff, 49/5/8 Croydon, 49/5/14 Finchley, 49/5/16 Harrow.

¹¹¹ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/3 East Acton.

knowledge of the law and generally decent working conditions.¹¹² The same was true in Northampton, also a centre for boot and shoe making.¹¹³ Chemical manufacturers Reckitts and sweet makers Needlers in Hull were seen by the YWCA there to have set the standard in terms of decent working conditions that were replicated by other employers.¹¹⁴ Dartford was dominated by new industries, most of which were not on a large scale, and where employers had set up their own welfare schemes.¹¹⁵ In Leicester, YWCA members had managed to improve conditions as a result of earlier problems at the Wolsey clothing factory.¹¹⁶ In other places, like Maidstone and Merthyr Tydfil, women were afraid of complaining about conditions in case this led to them being laid off.¹¹⁷ Shop work – and particularly the expected hours – caused concerns in Bristol and Newcastle.¹¹⁸ Women’s working conditions and prospects in Durham, however, were shaped by the overall decline in the economy in the area.¹¹⁹ Whilst leaders’ perceptions of their members’ legal knowledge varied, and there were also variations in the extent to which the branches offered lectures on legal issues, common to all of the responses was the value placed on having the ILB to turn to should a complaint come in. The ILB was the place to go for initial advice on a legal issue, before referring the matter to the relevant authorities.

The written evidence presented to the Commission offered a different view. They examined a 1928 memorandum by Constance Smith, which reflected on the work of the committee. Smith felt that the committee had a responsibility to working women and girls to obtain the appropriate knowledge, so that it might educate these women on the topics of ‘industry and wages’, ‘economics and governance’, to inform individuals.¹²⁰ The Central Council for the Welfare of Women and Girls argued that the ILB was particularly important for women and girls in domestic service, as getting to an evening Poor Man’s Lawyer session, for example, was almost impossible for those in this line of work. The daytime

¹¹² MRC, MSS.243/49/5/22 Kendal.

¹¹³ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/38 Northampton.

¹¹⁴ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/18 and 49/5/19 Hull.

¹¹⁵ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/9 Dartford.

¹¹⁶ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/25 Leicester.

¹¹⁷ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/29 and 49/5/30 Maidstone, 49/5/31 and 49/5/32 Merthyr Tydfil.

¹¹⁸ 4 MRC, MSS.243/9/5/4 Bristol, 49/5/34 Newcastle.

¹¹⁹ MRC, MSS.243/49/5/10 and 49/5/11 Durham.

¹²⁰ MRC, MSS 243/49/3/5/3 File of statistics, Miss Constance Smith’s Memorandum, 1928.

accessibility of the ILB was therefore important.¹²¹ Edith Ramsay wrote about how a Factory Inspector had recently asked her to pass cases directly to them, to avoid unnecessary delays.¹²² Dorothy McWilliam – a former secretary to the ILB Secretary, then a factory inspector – argued that the ILB’s work was valuable, but did not go far enough to address the problems faced by women in the workplace. McWilliam pointed to a growing confidence amongst working women in reporting cases of bad conditions. She was, however, concerned also about the extent of misunderstandings about the hours in shops that could be worked legally. McWilliam argued that some of the people who most needed the support of the ILB were those least likely to be at girls’ clubs or YWCA meetings because they were working such long hours – and in this way, educational work with mothers was also important.¹²³

The Commission also consulted Richard Clements, the Chief Advisory Officer of the NCSS for the Midlands. In a written contribution, Clements covered the educational possibilities of his BBC Radio broadcasts on industrial law, but also probed about the potential for a ‘national bureau’ involved with advice.¹²⁴ The NCSS were in the initial stages of planning what would become the Citizens Advice Bureaux, a national network of advice centres where members of the public could obtain guidance on a wide range of problems. Advice on rights at work and in terms of benefits had emerged through the NCSS and its members’ work on unemployment clubs in areas hit hard by the economic depression, as well as its reconsideration of the needs of urban communities in the early 1930s.¹²⁵

The Commission presented its report to the YWCA in May 1935. In the main, the commission called for the ILB’s committee to be reconstituted, to have experts from ‘each phase of the law’, to include representatives from the NCSS, in addition to representatives from the various elements of the YWCA. It called for breaches of the law to be reported directly to the Factory Inspector or other appropriate public official, rather than going to the

¹²¹ MRC, MSS.243/49/15/4 Written Evidence File, Letter Margaret Brooke, Central Council for the Social Welfare of Girls and Women in London and Central Information Bureau, to Curwen, 13 March 1935

¹²² MRC, MSS 243/249/2/4 Industrial Law Bureau Commission, 11 March 1935, 2; MSS.243/49/4/19 Letter Edith Ramsey to YWCA, 28 January 1935.

¹²³ MRC, MSS.243/50/1/8 Industrial Law Bureau data, Industrial Law Bureau Commission, Minutes 13 March 1935, 3.

¹²⁴ MRC, MSS.243/49/8/1 Industrial Law Questions to those giving evidence, Richard Clements.

¹²⁵ Richards, *Inform, Advise and Support*; Brasnett, *Voluntary Social Action*, 71-82.

ILB.¹²⁶ Legal advice cases would be referred to a local Poor Man's Lawyer, and cases relating to domestic servants to the National Council of Women's Household Service Section. The educational work of the ILB was transferred to the Education Committee, whilst the Commission called for the Parliamentary and Public Affairs Sub-Committee to be given more prominence within the YWCA as a whole. What remained was an expanded role for the Secretary, who would spend more time lecturing on industrial law to members and training YWCA staff. The proposed person specification asked for a candidate who ideally had a university degree, knowledge of the law, time spent living in 'an Industrial district and a knowledge of social conditions', along with qualifications in and experience of public speaking.¹²⁷ The ILB were not looking for a solicitor or barrister to take on this work, but rather an urban social worker, possibly based at a settlement house, with sufficient knowledge of the law. The ILB committee accepted the Commission's recommendations in June 1935, with the YWCA National Council following suit shortly after.¹²⁸ The ILB wound up its casework over the remainder of 1935, and cemented the shift to more educational work on the law through compiling a Handbook of Industrial Law.¹²⁹

Conclusion

The work of the Women's Industrial Council, Industrial Law Committee and Industrial Law Bureau demonstrates two aspects of women's claims on full citizenship in the early twentieth century. First, the pressing need for working-class women and their families to be able to access affordable and reliable legal advice on a wide range of matters, not just on divorce, the focus of policy makers and senior members of the legal profession in this period. Awareness of these needs arose from grassroots club and social work with women, and from trade union work. For women like Tuckwell, it was apparent from the cases seen in the magistrates'

¹²⁶ MRC, MSS.243/50/11/2 File re: Industrial Law Bureau, Report of the Industrial Law Bureau Commission for Consideration of the National Council and Executive of the YWCA, May 1935; MSS.243/49/2/5/1, p. 2.

¹²⁷ MRC, MSS.243/50/11/2 File re: Industrial Law Bureau, Report of the Industrial Law Bureau Commission for Consideration of the National Council and Executive of the YWCA, May 1935, pp.3-5.

¹²⁸ MRC, MSS.243/50/1/21, File re: Industrial Law Bureau, Industrial Law Bureau Report on meeting 17 June 1935, pp.1-2; MSS.243/49/11/10 Industrial Law Bureau Committee, Letter May Curwen to Committee members, 24 July 1935.

¹²⁹ MRC, MSS.243/49/13/1-79 ILB Handbook.

courts. Working-class women could suffer unnecessarily from not knowing about their rights. Second, whilst there were male lawyers who were sympathetic activists, middle-class women who had the expertise, experience and interest in trying to tackle the legal problems of working-class women could not do so as ‘full’ lawyers or magistrates until the 1920s. Proximate professions – social workers and factory inspectors – were a form of makeshift in addressing the need for feminist law as much as they were a means of supporting the professional claims of middle-class women. Legislation that sought to create and then uphold the rights and wellbeing of workers, particularly women workers, was not in synchronisation with women’s ability to be either lawmakers or legal professionals. It also draws our attention to the considerable amount of work by feminist and Labourite activists that went into trying to create a legal culture – a knowledge of one’s rights and where to go for help – for women, whether they were factory workers or involved in social work. This was itself part of a wider project – through the Poor Man’s Lawyer movement within the NCSS and settlement houses – to ‘mainstream’ legal and other advice services for working-class people, as seen through Tuckwell’s campaigning for the second Finlay Committee as well as the discussions around what would become the Citizens Advice Bureaux on the outbreak of the Second World War. By taking a different perspective on the women factory inspectors to consider them as legal agents, we gain fresh insight into the bigger picture of women’s legal activism.