

SERVING WOMEN AND THE STATE:
THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN IN COMMUNIST POLAND

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the complex ways in which a mass women's organization in communist Eastern Europe functioned within and served a communist party-state, while simultaneously acting on behalf of its own constituents, negotiating and exhibiting dissatisfaction with policy, and defining its activism. My study focuses specifically on the *Liga Kobiet* (League of Women) in Poland from its inception in 1945 to the 1990s. The group's composition, ideology, structure, and programs, as well as its changing role within the party-state, form the core of the study. Most scholars who have examined such women's organizations have portrayed them as centralized and bureaucratic puppets of the party-state. My work, in contrast, shows that even in communist party-states, organizations and the women who participated in them were not necessarily powerless and had some voice, although limited, in determining their specific role and status. Simultaneously, the League served the needs of both the state and women, and at certain moments of its history its members resisted party policy and sought to define the organization according to their own ideas. The League combined these two often conflicting (yet not mutually exclusive) goals of promoting party policy and advocating women's rights and needs in different ways as the political climate shifted over the years. My dissertation is the first in-depth case study of the mass women's organization in Poland during the communist period and one of the first of any such group in Eastern Europe. This study illustrates the complex ways in which official communist-era organizations could serve multiple purposes for different constituencies, helping us to think about the supposedly "totalitarian" party-states in a more nuanced way.

Dedicated to Ed, Matthew, and Thomas

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FIELDS OF STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

In an interview, Urszula P., a former textile worker and Communist Party member from the city of Łódź, suggested that the *Liga Kobiet* (League of Women), Poland's primary mass women's organization during the communist period, functioned on two fronts: for the state and for women.¹ The organization of which she was a long-time member, she claimed, attempted to be "loyal" to the state by working within the confines of what was acceptable to contemporary party leaders. League members concurrently "firmly tried to deal with" their "own issues" related to women's real everyday needs, as defined by the organization.² This dissertation explores the complex ways in which the League functioned within and served a communist party-state, while simultaneously acting on behalf of its own constituents, negotiating and exhibiting dissatisfaction with policy, and defining its activism. The League combined these two often conflicting (yet not mutually exclusive) goals of promoting party policy and advocating women's rights and needs.

Most historical studies of communist-era Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union until recently have portrayed the party and state as imposing ideology on citizens, leaving people with little or no power to act on their own behalf. Scholars, publishing predominantly during the communist period, characterized the socialist state as a monolithic, totalitarian, and centralized machine in opposition to the citizenry, a largely weak, homogenous, and easily manipulated entity. In recent years, historians have begun to move beyond this totalitarian model and instead have explored the myriad ways in which state socialism functioned on the ground. Not only did pressure from citizens often result in

¹ Until 1966, the League served as an umbrella organization, which included the *Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich* (Circles of Rural Housewives) and women's cooperatives. The rural women's group and cooperatives theoretically functioned under the League, yet they had their own leaders, programs, and meetings. In 1966, when they officially separated from the League, the League became solely an urban organization, although it often has been characterized as the only women's organization in Poland. Throughout their histories, though, these groups worked cooperatively on numerous issues related to women. On the Circles of Rural Housewives, see Izabela Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet (na przykładzie badań na Białostoczyźnie)* (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW w Białymstoku, 1984).

² Urszula P., interview by author, Łódź, 27 March 2000.

changes, but party leaders also presented opposing views of policy and communist ideology, pointing to the lack of uniformity within socialist states. People were actors, not just submissive recipients, and the party-state was not as centralized and effective as leaders had hoped. These newer studies blur the previously rigidly demarcated lines between party authorities and the populace, centralism and localism, capitalism and socialism, nationalism and communism, “Us” and “Them,” and state and society.³ The League serves as an example of how some of these lines were crossed.

Numerous scholars also have described Eastern European mass women’s organizations one-sidedly, following the totalitarian model, thereby leaving little room for other assessments. Women’s groups similar to the League functioned throughout the Soviet bloc. Scholars who have mentioned these organizations typically have characterized them negatively, arguing that they acted only or primarily as state agents, and, as a result, did little for women, or that they focused solely on women’s domestic role.⁴ As organizations directly affiliated with the state, according to these evaluations, these supposedly top-heavy, bureaucratic, monolithic, and centralized groups were not only unable but also unwilling to advocate for and promote women’s issues, and they blindly supported the party line, underscoring party needs and demands. Consequently, numerous studies have portrayed these groups as unimportant for women and, in some cases, detrimental to women’s current position.

These negative characterizations are in part accurate. These organizations undoubtedly worked under the direction of communist parties and often served state rather than women’s needs. To

³ Some examples of this recent historiography include David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin’s Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001).

⁴ For some examples of these negative characterizations, see Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women’s Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993), esp. chap. 6; Suzanne Körösi, “The Nonexistence of ‘Women’s Emancipation,’” in *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women’s Anthology*, ed. Robin Morgan (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1984), 289-93, esp. 292; Anna Titkow, “Poland: Let’s Pull Down the Bastilles before They Are Built,” in *ibid.*, 560-66, esp. 563; Sławomira Walczewska, “Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL,” *Pelny glosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 25-29; Dimitrina Petrova, “The Winding Road to Emancipation in Bulgaria,” in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 22-29; Doina Pasca Harsanyi, “Women in Romania,” in *ibid.*, 39-52; and Ewa Hauser, Barbara Heyns, and Jane Mansbridge, “Feminism in the Interstices of Politics and Culture: Poland in Transition,” in *ibid.*, 257-73.

function legally within the Soviet bloc, all organizations had to adhere to party guidelines and work within limits that officials delineated. Women's groups acted as bridges between women and the state, and especially during the stalinist period, one of their major responsibilities was to spread party propaganda among women in an effort to create loyal socialist women.⁵ The League was linked to the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (Polish United Workers' Party, i.e., Communist Party), as is shown through directives it received from officials, its active participation in disseminating party propaganda, and the party's involvement in choosing the group's uppermost "elected" positions. My project will examine this relationship between the League and the party-state, but it will also move beyond this assessment by exploring other ways in which the organization functioned, thereby complicating the relationship that it had with both the party and women.

My dissertation seeks to fit into the growing historiography that has departed from the totalitarian model by depicting the League in a more complex way as an organization that was not monolithic and static, was not solely a puppet of the party-state, and whose individual members presented their own often opposing ideas, similar to how socialism functioned on the ground. Differences between local and national initiatives, signs of dissatisfaction with and resistance to the party, and assistance of women emerge. I undertake this project assuming that members had reasons of their own for putting their energies into this group. Women were not merely pawns of the party-state but were also agents in their own right who determined what actions the League undertook and what ideas it explored. The organization demonstrated its partial autonomy and agency by developing and promoting programs and activities for women and, at specific historical moments, showing dissatisfaction with party initiatives and directives from above. Furthermore, although the League was directly connected to the party, it also provided some benefits for and acted on behalf of women.⁶ This project does not seek to rehabilitate a communist-era organization but rather seeks to demonstrate

⁵ Following historian Padraic Kenney, I lowercase the terms "stalinist" and "stalinism" to differentiate "the system from its founder." Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 3, n. 4.

⁶ Joanna Wawrzyniak has made a similar argument for the Union of Combatants for Freedom and Democracy (*Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację*), an organization formed in 1949 by the Communist Party, which included World War II veterans, partisans, and concentration camp survivors. She has stated that especially after 1956 this group was communist and nationalist, and at once it functioned for the party and for its members. Joanna Wawrzyniak, "Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację: Ewolucja ideologii a więź grupowa," in *PRL: Trwanie i zmiana*, ed. Dariusz Stola and Marcin Zaremba (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania im. Leona Koźmińskiego, 2003), 351-72.

various levels of activism of such a group. Presenting it only as a centralized and bureaucratic puppet is insufficient and inaccurate. In contrast, I strive to reveal a more balanced view of the League by exploring not only the official links to the party but also the ways in which members negotiated their relationship to the political system and created their own agendas and forms of activism. My study examines members' agency and experiences as well as the discourse they used in promoting state policy and women's issues.

Since the League was not a monolithic entity, when I use the term "League," it refers to the organization's official stance as written up in resolutions, plans, and conference proceedings. I also use "League" when no author is provided and the document or article appears to represent the official line. Whenever possible, I include actual names of women to make evident that individual members presented personal ideas often at odds with the official League stance and at odds with each other. Particularly after 1956, individual members discussed various options for the organization and attempted to try out different forms of activism. I have included both first and last names when provided in the sources; many documents and publications omitted names in part or entirely.

A few scholars have examined Eastern European communist-era women's mass organizations beyond just mentioning their connection to the party-state and their centralized structure. These studies allow for some comparisons between the League and other women's groups. Political scientist Sharon Wolchik, for example, examined the Czechoslovak women's group as part of her larger dissertation project on women's status in Eastern Europe as related to socialist ideology, politics, and gender equality. Showing how the group changed over time, she presented a balanced view of the Union of Czechoslovak Women, particularly in Czechoslovakia's reform years of 1967 to 1969 when, she argued, the organization "functioned as an interest group in the western sense of the term and defended women's interests."⁷ Her study provides an opportunity to make some interesting comparisons with the League. In numerous ways, the two organizations exhibited similarities, demonstrating the extent to which the socialist system influenced these groups and these organizations embraced socialist ideology. Comparisons also point to significant differences in terms of how and when these groups functioned, showing the nuances of individual Eastern European contexts and the lack of absolute control from the

⁷ Sharon L. Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality: The Status of Women in Eastern Europe" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980), 397.

center—the Soviet Union. While the Union of Czechoslovak Women, for example, stressed women’s interests between 1967 and 1969, the League centered its activism on allying with the party by emphasizing women’s role in raising good socialist youth.

Three scholars have conducted especially interesting and thought-provoking works on Hungarian women during the communist era and have included brief analyses of the Hungarian women’s organization specifically. Sociologist Éva Fodor has noted that the National Council of Hungarian Women “served as one of the most important tools in the construction of women as a separate group,” in other words as a gendered communist subject.⁸ In her study of the attempts to create a new gender regime in Hungary during the stalinist period, political scientist Joanna Goven has examined the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (the earlier name of the Council) and its role in the “reconstitution of sexual difference.”⁹ She also has addressed the discourse that the Alliance utilized in gendered propaganda efforts and the construction of gender not only by the state but also by the women’s group.¹⁰ Andrea Pető examined the constriction of the Hungarian women’s movement in the immediate postwar period and the formation of the communist-era women’s group, demonstrating that these organizations transformed their character, evolved over time, and eventually (but not immediately) became the sole women’s groups.¹¹ Although Fodor, Goven, and Pető have not addressed the ways in which the organization may have also assisted women, their studies are refreshing in that they move beyond simple characterizations of the group as party-controlled and provide complex analyses of the group’s participation in propaganda efforts.

⁸ Éva Fodor, “Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary,” *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (April 2002): 240-63, quotation on 249. See also Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women’s Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), esp. chap. 7.

⁹ Joanna Goven, “Gender and Modernism in a Stalinist State,” *Social Politics* (spring 2002): 3-28, quotation on 8. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women became the National Council of Hungarian Women in 1957.

¹⁰ Joanna Goven, “The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-politics of Anti-feminism, 1948-1990” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992), chap. 2.

¹¹ Andrea Pető, “Women’s Associations in Hungary: Demobilization and Remobilization, 1945-1951,” in *When the War Was Over: Women, War, and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*, ed. Claire Duchon and Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 132-45.

Soviet women's historians, particularly of the revolutionary and stalinist periods, have produced a rich and diverse body of literature, much of which has been useful for my work.¹² The *Zhenotdel's* (Women's Sections in Russia) role in spreading official policy and mobilizing women for the revolution and socialism has been well-documented.¹³ The *Zhenotdel*, however, differed from women's organizations in Eastern Europe in its relationship to the party. Composed of female Communist Party members, the *Zhenotdel* was explicitly a component of the party structure. In contrast, the League was a semi-independent organization with many members who were not affiliated with the party. In addition to awakening women's political consciousness, recruiting them into the party, and "drawing women workers into the business of constructing a new life," Women's Sections also had an important responsibility in "enlisting [women] in the revolutionary struggle in all forms, including the [military] front," a task that women's organizations in Eastern Europe did not possess.¹⁴

The *Zhensovety* (women's councils or women's soviets), established in the late 1950s in the Soviet Union, were more similar to the League than the earlier *Zhenotdel*. Genia Browning, in her study of women's political activism and the role of *zhensovety* in that activism, has demonstrated the contradictory and complex nature of women's organizations under communism. Like the League, the *zhensovety* worked locally but were also represented by a national body, functioned in workplaces and residential areas, and stressed women's political activism as well as practical assistance. Browning has

¹² The list is too long to include in its entirety here. The works that have been most instrumental in guiding my study are Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec, eds., *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). For good overviews of historiography in the field, although somewhat dated now, see Barbara Alpern Engel, "Women in Russia and the Soviet Union," *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 781-96, and Barbara Alpern Engel, "Engendering Russia's History," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (1992): 309-21.

¹³ See, for example, Wood, *Baba and the Comrade*; Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, esp. chap. 3; Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, "Sexual Equality in Soviet Policy: A Developmental Perspective," in *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 115-38, esp. 119-24; Janet E. Maher, "The Social Composition of Women Deputies in Soviet Elective Politics: A Preliminary Analysis of Official Biographies," in *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Tova Yedlin (New York: Praeger, 1980), 185-211, esp. 186; Carol Eubanks Hayden, "The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party," *Russian History* 3, no. 2 (1976): 150-73; and Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹⁴ Wood, *Baba and the Comrade*, 74.

argued that although the party controlled the organization, it at once acted as a pressure group to a limited extent, particularly for working women. It served to raise women's political and gender consciousness while simultaneously embracing traditional conceptions of gender roles.¹⁵ Not only has Browning's work raised interesting and important questions about women's consciousness and political activism in the context of socialist states, but it also has characterized women's organizations as being able to work for both women and the state, a finding that I likewise emphasize. My study moves in different directions than Browning's in that it does not focus predominantly on political consciousness but rather explores other ways in which the League served both women and the state.

A few scholars have conducted studies focused on the League. Sławomira Walczewska has emphasized the organization's party connections and has argued strongly that the League "assured itself exclusivity to all women's initiatives." She has concluded that "the effect of the 45-year period of its [the League's] existence, evident today, is women's political passivity, their incapability to organize and to protect their group interests (the case of antiabortion laws)."¹⁶ Walczewska has directly blamed the League for women's lack of initiative in promoting reproductive rights in the postcommunist era. She, however, has ignored the fact that the League, like other legally recognized organizations during communism, had to function within the confines of what the party deemed acceptable and thereby has overlooked the effects of the socialist state. The party-state, not necessarily the League, "assured" the organization's exclusivity in dealing with women's issues. Furthermore, in her implication that the League was to blame for women's passivity in promoting reproductive rights, she has neglected a huge factor—the influence of the Catholic Church. Walczewska's current position as a prominent feminist and women's activist in the postcommunist era no doubt has affected her views and portrayal of the group.¹⁷

¹⁵ Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet," 25, 29. See also Sławomira Walczewska, "Czy kobietom w Polsce potrzebny jest feminizm?" in *Co to znaczy być kobietą w Polsce*, ed. Anna Titkow and Henryk Domański (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 1995), 245-56.

¹⁷ Walczewska is the founder of the *Fundacja Kobieta* (Women's Foundation) in Kraków, which serves as a feminist outpost for women in Poland by providing a hotline, programs and lectures, a periodical (*Zadra* [Splinter], previously *Pełnym głosem* [With full voice]), and publications dealing with women's issues.

In contrast to Walczewska's negative depiction, two studies by Polish sociologists publishing during the communist era have characterized the League positively, largely overlooking the influence that the party had on the organization. Roman Wieruszewski, in his study of equality between women and men, included a brief examination of the League's goals and initiatives. Although he acknowledged that party leaders had some control over the organization, he mostly provided information from League resolutions and statutes about the group's goals of political and ideological education of women, assistance for women, and calls for greater equality in the workplace, without offering further analysis and demonstrating the group's relationship to the party. He noted that League members "administer an ambitious, and at the same time concrete program of activism, which allows us to anticipate with optimism the results of their work."¹⁸ Polish sociologist and League member Krystyna Wrochno included a section on the women's movement in communist-era Poland in her book on Polish women. Her work offers general information about the organization but little in terms of the complexity of the League's activism.¹⁹ Although both studies provide a one-sided positive portrayal of the League and minimal analysis, they do include basic information about how the League functioned alongside other women's groups, the group's historical transformations, and the organization's programs.

A few scholars have moved beyond these biased assessments of the League's role in party politics and women's lives. Zofia Sokół's study of women's periodicals during the communist period briefly traces the League's history and demonstrates, more than most other works, that the League fluctuated between a purely party-controlled propaganda organization and one that brought real assistance to women.²⁰ In her study of women's roles in the Solidarity movement and feminism in Poland, Anna Reading has mentioned the League's activism. Although the League worked within the state system, she has claimed, it "challenged the state, the Church, and men" as well. Unfortunately, her work does not explore extensively in what ways the organization made these challenges. Reading rightly has argued that the postcommunist organization "should not be dismissed simply because of its

¹⁸ Roman Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn w Polsce Ludowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1975), 215.

¹⁹ Krystyna Wrochno, *Woman in Poland* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1969), chap. 5. Her book was published in both Polish and English.

²⁰ Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945-95* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1998), chap. 4.

former links to the party,” an ongoing problem for the current group.²¹ Using the League in the Białystok region in northeastern Poland as a case study, Polish sociologist Izabela Ratman-Liwerska has provided the most complete overview of the organization’s history. Focusing on how the League served as a social-educational association for women, her study traces the League’s history, examines why women joined the organization, and describes some of the group’s forms of activism.²²

All of these scholars have provided valuable information about the League, yet they have not examined the organization in detail and have not provided much analysis. My dissertation incorporates many of the questions that studies of mass women’s organizations have raised, but it also moves beyond their research by including different questions about women’s activism during the communist period. For example, I examine how the League was formed, its connections to party politics, and possible links to interwar women’s activism in the immediate postwar period. My study explores the League’s specific gendered role in spreading propaganda in the stalinist period and the changing discourse members used in defining women as workers and mothers. More than any other work, my project delineates in detail the myriad ways in which the League assisted women and developed its own forms of activism, and how members showed signs of discontent and resistance.

As the primary women’s organization, the League served multiple purposes and had multiple goals, many of which my project examines. It was a politically oriented organization that sought to instill socialist ideology in and raise political consciousness of not only women but through women also families and children. It was an organization that educated women about a variety of topics, including politics, economics, law, child care, home economics, and the arts, and prepared some women for employment. Legal matters, such as receiving child support, determining a child’s father, and obtaining state assistance, were issues on which the League educated women both to instill official politics and to inform them about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The organization was a charitable and volunteer group that raised money for various national and international initiatives. It assisted flood victims, single mothers, orphaned children, and the elderly, and developed numerous free programs for women and their children. Finally, the League was a social organization that offered women a space in which to come together away from the workplace and the home. Members gathered

²¹ Anna Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 172, 173.

²² Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*.

to gossip, chat, discuss important issues, drink coffee and tea, eat pastries, and relax. An organization that took on so many, often contradictory, roles not surprisingly had multiple meanings for different women and as result has been judged in various ways.

These multiple roles did not translate into an organization that was based on feminist ideology. Political scientist Jean Robinson likewise has concluded that the League was not feminist. Using historian Nancy Cott's definition of feminism, which includes three components: "an opposition to sex hierarchy, the understanding of gender and sex as socially constructed and thus mutable, and the conscious perception by women that they constitute a social grouping," Robinson has maintained that the League showed signs of the first and last components but not the second. She has argued that "helping women to cope with the pressures and difficulties of consumption and reproduction is not the same as understanding the need to change the structure of consumption and reproduction." Consequently, she has defined the League as a "parafeminist" organization.²³ I do not see "parafeminism" as a useful concept in defining the League's work. Instead, I argue that the League simply was not feminist and instead stressed practical gender interests. Basing their analysis on Robinson's study, in their edited collection on state feminism, Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy Mazur have concluded that state feminism did not exist in Poland.²⁴ They define state feminism as "activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women's status and rights."²⁵ For state feminism to exist, they have argued, the agencies established by the state must have influence on feminist policy and those agencies must create "opportunities for society-based actors—feminist and women's advocacy organizations—to have access to the policy process."²⁶ Although the League assisted women, particularly in certain periods of its existence, and sometimes promoted policy changes, as an official women's organization within a socialist state, it did not advance feminist goals

²³ Basing her work on a limited source base, the *Rocznik polityczny i gospodarczy* (Political and economic yearbook, published annually by a state body), Robinson has explored the meanings of state feminism in the context of the League. Jean Robinson, "Women, the State, and the Need for Civil Society: The *Liga Kobiet* in Poland," in *Comparative State Feminism*, ed. Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1995), 202-20, quotation on 207.

²⁴ Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur, "Conclusion: The Case of State Feminism," in *Comparative State Feminism*, 272-91.

²⁵ Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur, "Introduction," in *Comparative State Feminism*, 1-21, quotation on 1-2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

and did not seek to empower other organizations and activists in promoting those goals. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess how much influence League activists actually had in determining policy related to women and how much of that policy was determined from above by party-state officials.

The League rarely attempted to transform the gender system and continued to promote differences between women and men that affected what types of jobs women performed and what responsibilities they had both inside and outside the home. Adopting socialist ideology, the group generally sought to create female producers in the marketplace without developing a new role for men within the domestic sphere. Although some members advocated equality between the sexes both in the “public” and “private” spheres, the organization as a whole continued to promote traditional conceptions of women’s and men’s roles, often basing them on biological differences. Women’s emancipation was a peripheral goal. In fact, the League increasingly moved away from revolutionary ideas of socialist feminist emancipation to traditionalism. Yet, although the League was not a feminist organization, it did provide beneficial assistance to women.²⁷ By examining the group closely, the dynamics of how the group worked on behalf of its constituents emerges.

My study is based on interviews, archival records, periodicals, memoirs, and League publications. I interviewed fifteen past and current League members mostly in 2000. Oral histories, as all sources, are problematic and need to be examined closely. These interviews were carried out during the postcommunist era, a period in which some Poles discredit the communist party-state and anything that was affiliated with it, while others look back to the communist era with nostalgia.²⁸ The period in which I conducted these interviews undoubtedly influenced what members revealed. Although some interviewees criticized some aspects of the organization, not surprisingly most provided a positive assessment of the group’s functions and their personal involvement in its activities. It is possible that some interviewees deliberately glossed over negative characterizations and instead provided positive

²⁷ The League was not a feminist organization, but some of its members characterized themselves as feminist. Numerous interviewees claimed to be feminist, while others saw no benefits of feminism.

²⁸ Poles often state, for example, that under communism they had money but no goods to purchase, whereas currently they do not have enough money to purchase the wide range of consumer goods that are available. Those who look on the communist period with nostalgia often argue that unemployment was not rampant, workers had greater stability in their jobs, and social stratification was less pronounced. Especially for women the postcommunist period has brought mixed results. Reproductive rights have been curtailed significantly, and women are typically the first fired and last hired. Those who discredit the communist era often argue that democracy and freedom are a huge improvement even with the current problems that women face.

sentiments as a way in which to legitimize the organization's history and their individual participation in an often discredited communist-era group. At the same time, however, the organization had been (and for some continues to be) a meaningful part of their lives. Interviewees expressed a belief in the importance of their work on behalf of women as well as for themselves. In contrast, negative perceptions may have been a way in which members tried to legitimize the current League and distance themselves from a mixed past history. Even though these oral histories can be interpreted in multiple ways, they are useful in shedding light on the League's history and in providing a personal component to women's activism.

For purposes of confidentiality, I have included only interviewees' first names with last initial, with the exception of the current League president, Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, and a past League president, Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, whose identities are well known. My interviews were open-ended. I began with a core set of questions but allowed the conversations to move in various directions. The interviewees often turned to discussions of the current situation for women and the League, issues that are important to them today. Repeatedly, I attempted to redirect our conversations to the past, although the League's present situation likewise interests me. The formal interviews ranged from thirty minutes to three hours. I also spoke informally with some members.

My interviews are a small sampling, rather than representative, of League membership. Eight interviewees had been members of the Communist Party at some point in their lives, and a few held leadership positions within the party.²⁹ At the time of the interviews, the youngest interviewee was fifty years old and the oldest was seventy-four. All were married with children. They served in the League in various capacities in residential, workplace, *Organizacja Rodzin Wojskowych* (Organization of Army Families), and *Koła Rodzin Milicyjnych* (Circles of Militia Families) chapters, and in administrative bodies on the provincial and national levels.³⁰ Their duration in League activism ranged from about three years to over fifty years. Most continue to have some affiliation with the organization today.

I located these members in a variety of ways. In 1996, while conducting separate research on the postcommunist women's movement, I contacted Barbara K. from Nowa Huta, the current president of the Nowa Huta administration, and talked with her and Wanda K. about the League's position in the

²⁹ I do not know the party affiliation for one, Bożena N.

³⁰ The Organization of Army Families and Circles of Militia Families were branches within the League. The structure of the League will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 1.

postcommunist period.³¹ Four years later, I met with them again, along with fifty-eight-year-old Bogusława J., a very softspoken woman, who was more of an observer of rather than a participant in the interview. Barbara, born in 1931, first invited me to her daughter's apartment in Kraków. Over tea and pastries, we spoke informally about her family, the current political and economic situation of Poland, and briefly about the League. Two days later, after meeting her in her daughter's apartment again, we traveled together by tram almost forty-five minutes to the center of Nowa Huta, where the League continues to use a small room in an apartment building for some of its activities. A retired engineer from the Steelworks in Nowa Huta and party member, Barbara began her League activism in the late 1940s as a student in Kraków. She was active in a residential chapter. Born in 1943, Wanda, a member since the early 1970s, began her League activism in a residential chapter and quickly became its president. Wanda obtained a college degree in Polish philology and was not a party member. Over tasty Polish pastries and coffee, we discussed their activism within the organization as well as women's current position in Poland for more than three hours.

Fifty-year-old Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka and fifty-five-year-old Bożena N., the current Central Administration's president and office director respectively, sat down with me individually in the League office in Warsaw. My initial correspondence with Izabela was via letter prior to my arrival to Poland, followed by a phone call. Since Izabela began her League activism in the early 1990s, our conversation centered on the current situation for the organization and for women more generally. Her education at the University of Warsaw centered on ethnography with an emphasis on the history of Mongolia. After being thrown out of the *Polska Akademia Nauk* (Polish Academy of Sciences) because she refused to join the party, she eventually was asked to work on a project focusing on a gendered analysis of school textbooks for the League. Prior to this project, she had not been interested in feminism or women's issues. Shortly thereafter, she was elected as League president. Her two daughters likewise have shown strong interest in feminism and women's rights. An outspoken feminist and politician, Izabela co-founded the leftist *Unia Pracy* (Work Union) Party and is a member of Poland's Parliament. She is well respected by League members as well as women in other

³¹ Centrum Promocji Kobiet, *Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland* (Warsaw: Centrum Promocji Kobiet, 1995, 1997) lists contact information for the League in various regions of Poland.

organizations for her diplomacy, intelligence, confidence, assertiveness, and eagerness to work cooperatively with others.

After completing her education at the Politechnic University in the city of Łódź, Bożena began her League activism in 1964 in a workplace chapter in a textile factory. Her husband, Minister of Internal Affairs, transferred his family to Warsaw in 1968. Bożena immediately became a member of a residential chapter in Warsaw, then secretary of a neighborhood administration, and eventually office director (a paid position) and member of the Central Administration. She also was in charge of compiling and editing information on League chapters and Home Economics centers for two internal League publications.

Bożena provided me with names and contact information for a few other long-time members, and, along with Izabela, invited me to attend a national League seminar entitled “Women’s Rights, Human Rights” held in Warsaw, where I met some of these members.³² During this seminar I spoke informally with a number of women and set up interviews with Urszula P., currently a vice-president of the Central Administration and city administration in Łódź, and Irena H., the president of the Opole provincial administration and a vice-president of the Central Administration.

A few days later, I traveled to Łódź, a city that often has been referred to as feminine due to the prevalence of women’s employment in the textile industry, where I met with Urszula in a run-down building that houses the League’s office. Born in 1936, Urszula became a member of the Communist Party in 1954 and a member of the League in 1958 in a textile firm that produced pantyhose. In later years, she served on the party’s Central Committee and the factory’s party committee. She finished secondary technical school and worked in textiles all her life.

The city of Opole in southwestern Poland was my next destination. Located near the city’s center in a beautiful old building dating back to the Prussian partition of Poland, the League’s Opole office houses a few office spaces, a small banquet facility, and a Home Economics Center, where the organization continues to offer courses primarily in cooking. Fifty-two-year-old Irena H. graciously invited me to stay in her apartment during my two-day visit and personally called League members and arranged interviews for me. With Irena, I had two formal interviews in the office as well as many

³² The League holds these types of seminars on a variety of themes regularly around the country. Members as well as women not affiliated with the organization are encouraged to attend, as are government officials. Approximately forty women attended the seminar in Warsaw.

informal conversations with her, her husband, and her staff (Irena, the office director, and Renia, the director of the Home Economics Center, both of who cooked delicious meals during my visit). At age eighteen, Irena joined the Communist Party and later served as secretary of the party's *powiatowy* (district) committee. With a higher education in commerce, pedagogy, and political education, she eventually ran political schooling for the party. After she married a militia officer, she became a League member in 1968 as part of the Circle of Militia Families and quickly moved up in League ranks.

Thanks to Irena, I conducted five additional interviews in Opole. Sixty-seven-year-old economist Helena P., whose husband was in the army, joined the Organization of Army Families in 1955. She was not affiliated with the party. Two years later she became a chapter president and in 1960 a regional president of this League branch. Zofia K., a seventy-four-year-old former party member, began her activism in 1947 in the Circles of Rural Housewives. In the 1950s, she moved to a city, worked in the militia administration, and joined the League's militia branch. With a higher education from a university in Kraków, Helena C., sixty years old, began her League activism in the late 1960s in a chapter in a workplace where she held a managerial position. She had been a party member for nineteen years. Leokadia Ś. finished three years of university education and was not a party member (although she wishes she had been). Currently, at fifty-three, she runs a folk art company that employs women mostly in their homes to make intricately painted porcelain and Easter eggs. As a young woman, she joined a youth club through which she became acquainted with the League. As a League member, Leokadia organized various artistic competitions, especially for rural women.

My interview with Kazimiera C., a fifty-eight-year-old former party member, proved to be most challenging. An assessor for Opole's regional family court who completed secondary education, Kazimiera joined the League in 1952 in a chapter connected to the provincial government body. Unlike most other interviewees, she hesitantly shared her experiences and deliberately strayed away from negative sentiments and portrayals of the communist period. Kazimiera went so far as to state that during martial law in the early 1980s, there were no shortages of goods in stores, an assessment that is difficult to believe. She refused to provide me with her address even after I told her that the only reason why I ask for this information is to send a thank you note (which I did for all of my interviewees). She asked me why I wanted birth dates and refused to tell me how long she had been a party and League

member. Having lived most of her life during the communist era, Kazimiera still distrusts anyone who, in her opinion, asks for too much information that potentially could be used against her in the future.

Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa bridged the communist and postcommunist periods as the League's president. Trained as a teacher, Elżbieta also served as a director of a school and today works as a principal of a private high school of economics in the center of Kraków. We met in her bustling office; our conversation was interrupted by staff and the sounds of school bells, trams, and sirens. Born in 1947, a former party member, Elżbieta joined the League in the 1970s, served as its president for four years, and was reelected but decided to resign to be closer to her family. As president, she had moved to Warsaw. She experienced difficulty in adjusting to the postcommunist era and decided to forego her League activism and instead has focused solely on her family and career.

Finally, I interviewed one of my aunts, Marysia P., and her friend Danuta B. in Nowy Targ, a small city nestled in the mountains of Southern Poland. Both women had been members of residential chapters and both served on the party's provincial committee.³³ Marysia's membership within the League was brief—approximately two to three years in the mid-1960s—while Danusia was a member from 1960 until 1981 when she left for the United States for a few years. She served as a residential chapter president. Referring to themselves as "*proste baby*" (simple women) and "*wygadane baby*" (chatty women),³⁴ they engaged in a lively conversation and provided a working-class perspective. Marysia, sixty-three years old, completed primary education and worked as a manager in a shoe factory. Her party membership, she claimed, assisted her in her workplace advancement. Sixty-year-old Danusia worked at the same factory and finished elementary education.

My research in organizational records focused on the national organization, whose early documents are located at the National Archives in Warsaw. I also examined records at three regional archives, as well as local documents housed at the National Archives, to gain a better understanding of how the organization worked on the local level. Only a small group of upper-level League leaders and some party officials had access to most of these documents, many of which were unpublished League reports produced regularly for the League's *Zarządy Wojewódzkie* (provincial administrations) and the *Zarząd Główny* (Central Administration). Internal reports typically included tasks that the League

³³ Having grown-up in a family who opposed the communist party-state, I was especially surprised to learn about my aunt's involvement with the party.

³⁴ *Baby* has multiple meanings, including women, a pejorative for women, or peasant women.

accomplished and directions in which individual chapters sought to move their activism. They served as a mechanism for determining the measure of success of initiatives and to assess the effects of League programs. They often included a tactic common in the stalinist era, the ritualistic performance of “criticism and self-criticism” in which one was expected to criticize oneself as well as others as a way to “reveal and repair” defects in an effort to improve.³⁵ Consequently, the criticism included in these documents may have been exaggerated (but not necessarily made up), pointing to greater successes than documented. In contrast, local chapters at times may have embellished the truth to impress leaders or to win ongoing competitions among chapters, which were largely based on such reporting. My sources cannot simply be taken at face value; some were undoubtedly censored and possibly falsified. However, although communist-era sources have been criticized for high levels of propaganda, the possibility of falsifying or exaggerating reports is true for any sources that historians use and should not be solely assigned to the communist period. The combination of positive propaganda and expectation of criticism results in a more balanced picture of the period than one might expect. Furthermore, embellished or exaggerated reporting, I believe, existed alongside genuine expressions of actual experiences. After careful readings of sources and cross checking interpretations, I stress the possibility that members’ statements and actions are, at the very least, in part genuine in these documents.

The League published numerous periodicals for women, all of which I examined, as well as an internal monthly bulletin, *Nasza praca* (Our work), the most important source for my study. *Nasza praca*, published from 1947 until 1989, was available to all League members and party officials. It provided important information about official party policy as well as descriptions of local and national League programs and activities. Speeches by League and party leaders; minutes from League meetings; depictions of women from all over the world, especially from other socialist nations; and information about the Women’s International Democratic Federation, an organization with which the League was

³⁵ Alexei Kojevnikov, “Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948,” *Russian Review* 57, no. 1 (January 1998): 25-52, quotation on 36. League members were aware of and utilized this ritualistic performance in their own meetings and reports. A few articles in League publications directly mentioned “criticism and self-criticism.” See, for example, Alicja Musiałowa, “Zadania kobiet polskich w walce o pokój i plan 6-letni,” Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, *Nasza praca*, no. 6-7 (March-April 1951): 21-41, esp. 36; “Ramowy plan pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1951,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (January 1951): 4-16, esp. 4; and Stanisława Zawadecka, “Zadania pracy wśród kobiet w świetle wytycznych VII-go Plenum KC PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1952): 12-25, esp. 25.

affiliated, also appeared. Published between 1949 and 1952, *Poznajmy prawdę* (Let's learn the truth) was intended specifically for educating and informing the organization's agitators (*przodownice społeczne*), whose role was to spread official party propaganda among women during the stalinist period. Within its pages, agitators found instructions on how to approach women, what topics to address, how to answer questions, and how to complete their tasks successfully. From 1958 until 1989, the League published *Gospodarstwo domowe* (Home Economics), which provided information to home economics instructors on how to conduct their work. I also explored several popular women's magazines, including *Kobieta* (Woman), *Kobieta dzisiejsza* (Today's Woman), *Kobieta i życie* (Woman and Life), *Przyjaciółka* (Girlfriend), and *Zwierciadło* (Mirror) to get a sense of the type of information that women in the mainstream received about the League.³⁶ I also investigated other League publications, such as booklets, conference proceedings, statutes, and books. Although editors self-censored their publications, as did authors and publishers of all published sources under communism, these periodicals provide a wide range of valuable information about the League's day-to-day activities, the discourse members used, and the relationships that the League had with the party and women. A careful reading of documents, conference proceedings, agitators' reports, and internal and mainstream publications shows that members emerge as both active agents expressing their views about their experiences within the organization and ideas about women's roles as well as agents of the state, performing tasks and employing language that were viewed as essential to the socialist project.

This dissertation is divided into five thematic chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the League. It discusses the League's formation in 1945, its connections to the prewar women's movement, its structure, and its membership. I look specifically at the current League's attempts to legitimize the communist-era group by linking it to a prewar women's group of the same name and demonstrate why the postwar group was in fact a new organization that incorporated some of the same objectives as the interwar women's movement and some of the same members. The chapter moves to a discussion of how the League functioned both centrally and locally, thereby indicating the inaccuracy of portraying it as only a centralized entity. This chapter also presents a sketch of the characteristics of members by examining their party affiliation, age, educational levels, and occupations. Finally, it moves to a

³⁶ The League published *Zwierciadło* from 1957 until 1960, after which it was taken over by the official state publishers. In 1982 until 1990, the League once again served as its publisher. In 1959, the

discussion of why women joined the group and the meaning that they gave to their personal activism in a communist-era women's organization.

The second chapter explores the League's role in the political and ideological education of women especially in the stalinist period, an era in which propaganda was most rampant throughout Eastern Europe. I analyze the League's use of propaganda to instill communist ideology in and promote official policy among women. I begin with an investigation of the League's participation in communist state building in the late 1940s by addressing the organization's involvement in advocating and promoting among women Poland's 1946 referendum and rigged elections of 1947, both of which led to a consolidation of political power under the Communist Party. The bulk of the chapter examines a specific group of members, *przodownice społeczne* (agitators), who were trained to enlighten "backward" women, often defined as housewives, about socialism. I address the gendered components of this propaganda method by exploring the ways in which agitators performed their responsibilities, the reasons why they were specifically sought after for this task, and the discourse used in depicting women. This project of enlightening women subsided toward the end of the stalinist period, but the League continued, although to a lesser degree, its attempts at political and ideological education of women.

The following chapter addresses the League's perceptions of and activism dealing with women's maternal and domestic roles as well as their position in the communist system as paid workers, in other words women's so-called double burden of motherhood and employment. The dilemma of combining work and motherhood was not a challenge solely for women's organizations (and not a challenge solely for socialist countries). Socialist ideology perpetually struggled with how women could most successfully combine these two roles, demonstrating a paradox of encouraging women to work as a way toward achieving emancipation and encouraging them to reproduce without adequate social services. Both the League and socialist thinkers more generally urged women to take on the responsibility of work outside the home without changing either women's or men's responsibilities within the home. This chapter examines the League's changing images of workers and mothers/housewives, showing how women's ideal roles within socialism were altered depending on the

League also published *Ja i mój dom* (Me and My Home) and between 1960 and 1973, *Ty i ja* (You and I), neither of which were useful for my study.

specific context within the communist period. It also explores the attempts that the organization made to aid women in easing their double burden.

Chapter 4 moves to an analysis of what the League accomplished, or at the very least tried to accomplish, for women, and how women who took advantage of League activities and programs garnered some benefits from the organization. Especially after 1956, the group promoted “practical activism” that focused on helping women in waging their everyday struggles and in combining their roles as workers and mothers. I first examine the *Komitet do spraw Gospodarstwa Domowego* (Committee for Home Economics Affairs), a committee that the League formed as a mechanism to assist women in their practical needs. This Committee, along with its centers and clinics throughout Poland, conducted research on household goods, trained home economics instructors, provided courses mostly on domestic-related issues, and published brochures and a monthly periodical. In particular, I portray ways in which women benefited from these home economics courses. Next, I turn to an investigation of how the organization intervened on behalf of women. The League served as a free legal counseling center and an intermediary between state officials/institutions and women. Through these interventionist programs, the organization attempted to assist women in alleviating their everyday problems and hardships. Finally, I explore the League as a female space for socializing, spending free time, and relaxing away from work and family, as well as the meanings that members attributed to their activism.

The final chapter shows how members sought to define their organization and represent women based on what they, not the party, found to be of greatest importance. I illustrate that at specific moments of the League’s history, members showed dissatisfaction toward official party policy, negotiated organizational goals, acted as agents on behalf of women, and sought to determine their own forms of activism, particularly for approximately one decade after 1956 and again in the 1980s, two critical moments in Polish history. During these periods, members more openly than in other years expressed their personal views of the directions that they wanted the League to take, of the problems that they witnessed within the organization, and of the ways in which the group could assist women, particularly in combining their roles as workers and mothers. The chapter also explores the League’s transformations from functioning within workplace and residential chapters to solely functioning within areas of residence and vice versa. Especially with the party’s directive to abolish workplace chapters in 1966, I demonstrate how members’ signs of discontent regarding employed women’s

positions and conditions of work led to this decision from above. I explore the reactions from members following the directive, and the League's eventual decision to reinstate workplace chapters in the early 1980s.

I argue that members showed signs of resistance to the party-state by expressing dissatisfaction with the status quo prior to the dissolution of workplace chapters and by continuing to express uneasiness about the directive after it had been made. Studies of resistance in Eastern Europe generally examine either visible acts such as protests and strikes or everyday acts of resistance, such as stealing from the state, attending church services, or refusing to attend meetings.³⁷ I define "resistance" more broadly in the case of the League as deliberately expressed dissatisfaction toward party-state policies and directives, including policies and conditions within the workplace, over some of which party officials may have had little control. Undoubtedly, individual members also participated in other forms of resistance. As Andrzej Friszke has argued, accommodation and resistance often functioned side by side, even by the same groups of people. Poles who chose to be party members (and in the case of my work, League members) undoubtedly exhibited accommodation to the system, but their membership did not "exclude resistance on certain issues and in some situations."³⁸

My dissertation is the first in-depth case study of the mass women's organization in Poland during the communist period and one of the first of any such group in Eastern Europe. My work shows that even in communist party-state structures, women activists were not necessarily powerless but rather had some voice, although limited, in determining their specific role and status. Furthermore, it demonstrates the League's complex relationship to the state and to women by examining how members of the group participated in the political structure, how they sought to assist women, and how they defined their own activism. This study illustrates the complex ways in which official communist-era organizations could serve multiple purposes for different constituencies, helping us to think about the supposedly "totalitarian" party-states in a more nuanced way.

³⁷ On resistance in Poland, see especially Dariusz Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948-1956 a chłopi* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1998); Błażej Brzostek, *Robotnicy Warszawy: Konflikty codzienne (1950-1954)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2002); Łukasz Kamiński, *Polacy wobec nowej rzeczywistości, 1944-1948: Formy pozainstytucjonalnego, żywiołowego oporu społecznego* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2000); Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*; and Joanna Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie: Stalinowska próba modernizacji opornej rzeczywistości* (Warsaw: Trio, 2000).

³⁸ Andrzej Friszke, "Przystosowanie i opór: Rozważania nad postawami społecznymi 1956-1970," in *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2001), 138-55, quotation on 141.

CHAPTER 1

COMPLICATING THE LEAGUE'S FORMATION, STRUCTURE, AND MEMBERSHIP

Following a war that devastated vast areas of Poland, shifted the country's borders, and significantly depleted the population, the immediate postwar period, not surprisingly was one of physical, social, economic, and political rebuilding and transformation.¹ During the first two years, "the Pole . . . was a wanderer," as were people of all nationalities living in Poland.² Traveling from all corners of the country, people arrived to cities hardest hit during World War II, especially the capital city of Warsaw, to participate in rebuilding their homeland. Filled with patriotic fervor, men, women, and youth worked diligently in cleaning up by organizing brigades to pick up rubble by hand and in restoring their cities to their prewar beauty. The postwar years not only experienced this renewal of the physical space but also witnessed a civil war in which remnants of the Home Army fought to attain power.³ Various political factions also struggled to gain power. With most interwar leaders either dead or in exile, Poland was left with a political void, which the *Polska Partia Robotnicza* (Polish Workers' Party, PPR, i.e., the Communist Party) and the *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna* (Polish Socialist Party, PPS), among others, attempted to fill. By the end of

¹ Poland's borders shifted West following World War II. The country acquired rich industrial land from Germany and lost land in the East to the Soviet Union, causing much dissent and discussion in the war's aftermath.

² Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, trans. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 164. Approximately 1.5 million people returned after the war; a substantial amount left; and many moved within the country either back to their homes, from the countryside to cities that offered employment, or to the Recovered Territories in the West. *Ibid.*, 164-65.

³ The Home Army was Poland's underground army during World War II. The Nazis decimated much of the Home Army in the Warsaw Uprising at the end of the war. On the civil war, see, for example, Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, Krystyna Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem: Polska, 1944-1956* (London: Aneks, 1993); and Antony Polonsky and Bolesław Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge, 1980).

1948, after a long and heated struggle both within the country and with Polish leaders living in exile in London, the communist takeover in Poland was largely complete.⁴

Less than four months after the end of the Second World War and in the midst of this tense atmosphere, a few women from various leftist political backgrounds under the initiation of the Socialist Party formed the *Spoleczno-Obywatelska Liga Kobiet* (Social-Civic League of Women, SOLK), which in 1948 became the League of Women, the name by which it is most commonly known.⁵ Was SOLK a new organization or did it have links to an interwar women's group? Did it adopt activism of the interwar women's movement? How was it organized, and who were its members? This chapter explores these questions, showing that the League was undoubtedly connected to the Communist Party from its origins, yet at the same time also exhibited signs of local initiative and included women from various backgrounds, who had reasons of their own (often not ideological) for joining.

New or Old?: Connections to the Interwar Women's Movement

Throughout the communist period, the League officially recognized 1945 as its year of origin and always used that date to mark anniversaries. Even in its initial years prior to a full-blown communist takeover, members recognized the organization as new. In 1947, for example, SOLK president Irena Sztachelska stated that "the League originated in 1945 shortly after the end of the war, it is therefore a new

⁴ On the communist takeover of Poland, see Polonsky and Drukier, *Beginnings of Communist Rule*; Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, and Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem*. On the first year after the war, see especially Krystyna Kersten, *Rok pierwszy* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1993). For takeovers in Eastern Europe more generally, see Jerzy Tomaszewski, *The Socialist Regimes of East Central Europe: Their Establishment and Consolidation, 1944-67*, trans. Jolanta Krauz (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁵ Women in other Eastern European countries likewise formed similar organizations, and in each country these organizations became mass groups and the sole representatives for women, particularly in urban areas. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska has stated that the League changed its name in March 1947. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet (na przykładzie badań na Białostoczyźnie)* (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW w Białymstoku, 1984), 76. My sources point to a later date.

women's organization in Poland."⁶ She, as one of the founders, made no claims to earlier connections. In contrast, some current members and the postcommunist League in general designate 1913 as the year in which the group took shape, linking it to an organization of a similar name that operated during World War I and in the interwar period.⁷ I argue that the League, indeed, was a new organization, yet while there may have been no organizational links to a specific interwar women's group, some SOLK founders had experience in women's and political activism prior to their League membership, and the postwar organization, in many ways, functioned as had earlier women's groups.

From its inception, the League was affiliated with the Communist Party and other leftist political groups. On 23 August 1945, at the initiation of a Socialist Party member, Izolda Kowalska, a committee came together in Warsaw and decided to create a women's organization under the name SOLK.⁸ One week later, on 1 September, they formed a *Zarząd Tymczasowy* (Provisional Administration) with women from various leftist political backgrounds on the board. Sztachelska, the only board member not affiliated with a political party, became the League's first president.⁹ Eugenia Pragierowa¹⁰ and Regina Fleszarowa,¹¹

⁶ Irena Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet: Drukowane na prawach rękopisu* (Warsaw: Zarząd Główny Ligi Kobiet [hereafter ZGLK], 1947), 3.

⁷ Barbara K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000; and Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, interview by author, Kraków, 9 June 2000. Barbara acknowledged that the goals of the interwar and postwar League were different, but she still has claimed that the later organization evolved from the earlier one. In a directory of women's organizations in the postcommunist era, the League lists 1913 as its date of origin. See Centrum Promocji Kobiet, *Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland* (Warsaw: Centrum Promocji Kobiet, 1997), 86-87; as does the official League website *ligakobietpolskich*. Office director of the Central Administration, Bożena N., has argued that to choose one date covers up the complexity of its origins. In some areas, like Silesia, she has claimed, members can make the connection to the interwar, while some chapters just formed in the 1990s, like in Białe-Podlasie. Bożena N., interview by author, Warsaw, 17 March 2000.

⁸ Kowalska had been politically active in the interwar and war periods. During the interwar period, she was a member of the *Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polski* (Communist Union of Polish Youth) and the illegal *Komunistyczna Partia Polski* (Communist Party of Poland). During the occupation she helped form the Socialist Party and served as secretary of regional and provincial Socialist Party committees. She also worked closely with Władysław Gomułka (who later became party secretary) and served in the Socialist Party's Organization Department. After the first few years in the League, she did not serve on the League's Central Administration until 1962 for four years. Melania Mroczek-Szymańska, "Pamiętamy o nich," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1985): 13-16, esp. 14; and Romana Lewandowska, "Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1985): 23-26, esp. 25.

⁹ Born in 1911, Sztachelska was raised in a middle-class family in Vilnius (Lithuania) and became involved in leftist politics during the interwar period. She was also a pediatrician who, along with her husband, served in the Red Army during World War II in the Women's Battalion. In 1944, she lived and worked in

Socialist Party members; and Stanisława Garnarczykowa,¹² a member of the *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*

Moscow for the Union of Polish Patriots. Once she moved to Warsaw in 1945, according to Zofia Bystrzycka, the “government and party” placed her in the position of League president, even though she would have preferred to continue her medical career. A mother of two, she stepped down from the League’s presidency in 1950 to become a director of a state institution devoted to mothers and children. She also served as deputy to the Polish Parliament. She continued to serve on the League’s Central Administration and later on the Presidium until the early 1970s. Zofia Bystrzycka, “Trzeba znaleźć swoje miejsce,” in *Opowiadamy naszym życiu: 10 lat Polski Ludowej* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1955), 104-21; Lewandowska, “Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet,” 25; Melania Mroczek-Szymańska, “Kalendarium Ligi Kobiet Polskich,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1986): 7-27, esp. 18; and Irena Sztachelska and Jadwiga Biedrzycka, interview by Elżbieta Karwacka, “Wczoraj i dziś,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1985): 3-12, esp. 8. Her husband, Jerzy Sztachelski, became a member of the Communist Party in 1945 and served in various departments and ministries of the party. Tadeusz Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy, 1944-1991: Władze państwowe i polityczne Polski według stanu na dzień 28 II 1991* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAN, 1991), 430.

¹⁰ Pragierowa (1888-1964) studied history at the prestigious Jagiellonian University and later received her law degree in Zurich. During the interwar period, she was a professor at the *Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej* (Free Polish University) and was active in labor organizations and the Socialist Party. Following WWII, she became the first woman vice-minister of the Department of Work and Social Care, served as vice-president to the Women’s International Democratic Federation, and became a member of the *Komisja Rewizyjna* (Financial Board) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party as well as a member of Parliament. Later, she served as League vice-president until 1964. Mroczek-Szymańska, “Pamiętamy o nich,” 13; and *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (1968): 2.

¹¹ Educated at the Sorbonne, Fleszarowa (1888-1969) was a geographer, geologist, and a “pioneering tourist.” During the interwar period, she served as president of the *Narodowa Organizacja Kobiet* (National Organization of Women)—a largely Catholic and right-wing women’s group founded in 1919. She also participated in the *Klub Kobiet Postępowych* (Progressive Women’s Club)—a small organization also founded in 1919 whose members came mostly from the intelligentsia. She was a deputy to the Polish Parliament in the interwar period and often criticized interwar politics for its treatment of women. During World War II, she was a member of the Women’s Rifle Brigade in L’viv, a support group for the army. Joanna Dufurat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej od Ligi Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego do Ochotniczej Legii Kobiet (1980-1918/1919)* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2001), 98; Aleksandra Piłsudska, Marja Rychterówna, Wanda Pełczyńska, and Marja Dąbrowska, *Wierna służba: Wspomnienia uczestniczek walk o niepodległość, 1910-1915* (Warsaw: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1927), 46-48; Dobrochna Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej: Dylematy środowisk kobiecych* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze “Historia Iagellonica,” 2001), 13, 152; Andrzej Chojnowski, “Aktywność kobiet w życiu politycznym,” in *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse: Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej*, ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 37-48, esp. 42-43; Melania Mroczek-Szymańska, “Nie będzie jej z nami w dniach obchodów 25-lecia Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1969): 3-15; Sztachelska and Biedrzycka, interview by Karwacka, “Wczoraj i dziś,” 8; Mroczek-Szymańska, “Pamiętamy o nich,” 13; and Stefan Król, *101 kobiet polskich: Ślad w historii* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1988), 394-99.

¹² Garnarczykowa served as deputy to Parliament and participated in the people’s movement during the interwar period. Her activism in the League centered on rural women. Mroczek-Szymańska, “Pamiętamy o nich,” 14.

(Polish Peasant Party), acted as vice-presidents.¹³ Kowalska served as general secretary.¹⁴ The remaining women—Helena Płotnicka,¹⁵ Felicja Fornalska,¹⁶ and Maria Turlejska,¹⁷ all members of the Communist Party; and Maria Jaszczukowa,¹⁸ a member of the *Stronnictwo Demokratyczne* (Democratic Party)—made up the rest of the administrative board.¹⁹ Most of the SOLK founders had a history of activism either in the women's movement or in leftist political parties in the interwar and war periods; activism, therefore, was not a novel concept to them. Most continued their leadership role in the League following the immediate postwar period by serving on the *Zarząd Główny Ligi Kobiet* (Central Administration of the League of

¹³ Historian Sławomira Walczewska names these three women as the vice-presidents, while Mroczek-Szymańska names two of them, Pragierowa and Garnarczykowa, as secretaries. Regardless of the position they served, they were all founding members. Sławomira Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL," *Pełnym głosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 25-29, esp. 27.

¹⁴ Walczewska does not include her at all, but Mroczek-Szymańska and Lewandowska do.

¹⁵ Płotnicka (1891-1971) joined the Socialist Party in 1912 and the interwar Communist Party in 1926. She was arrested during the interwar period, hid people during the war, conducted propaganda work for the party during the occupation, and participated in the interwar women's movement. She later served as a member of the League's Central Administration (1957-1962). Krystyna Zalewska, "Helena Płotnicka (1891-1971)," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1971): 3-5; Mroczek-Szymańska, "Pamiętamy o nich," 15; and Lewandowska, "Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet," 25.

¹⁶ Fornalska participated in the labor movement during the interwar period and engaged in propaganda work for the Communist Party during the war. Weronika Jackowska, "Spotkanie aktywu kobiecego z okazji 25-lecia PRL," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1979): 3-24, esp. 19-20; Lewandowska, "Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet," 25; and Felicja Fornalska, interview by Felicja Borzyszkowa-Sękowska, "Z perspektywy prawie stu lat," in *Być kobietą . . .* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia, 1982), 62-78.

¹⁷ Turlejska engaged in propaganda-agitational work of the Communist Party during the war. Lewandowska, "Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet," 25.

¹⁸ Jaszczukowa served as a member of the League's Presidium for one term between 1951 and 1957, and at the 1957 League conference, she was named the president of the Home Economics Committee and served in that capacity for a few years. She remained on the Central Administration until 1962.

¹⁹ On the breakdown of these women by party membership, see Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet," 27; "Rozwój Ligi Kobiet w okresie od 1945 – 1951 r.," [1951], File "KC PZPR," sygn. 237/XV-30, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (hereafter AAN); Mirosława Olszewska, "30 lat działalności Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1975): 3-30, esp. 3-4; and Lewandowska, "Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet," 15. Other names that have come up as possible founding members include Halina Kuczkowska and Janina Święcicka. "XX," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1965): 7-65, esp. 8-9; and Sztachelska and Biedrzycka, interview by Karwacka, "Wczoraj i dziś," 6. Święcicka, an activist in women's cooperatives, was a member of the Central Administration during the stalinist period until around 1962. Lewandowska has stated that out of twenty-one women on the administration (although she does not say that this was the provisional administration), twelve were Communist Party members. Lewandowska, "Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet," 25.

Women, ZGLK) in various capacities. Yet none asserted that the postwar League was directly connected to an interwar women's group.

Following the break-up of communism, numerous members and the League officially have discarded this rendition of the League's formation and instead have looked to the history of an earlier organization carrying a similar name. In 1913, Iza Moszczeńska—an activist concerned with education, suffrage, and social issues²⁰—along with twenty-three other women met secretly in a private home and created a conspiratorial women's organization under the name of *Liga Kobiet Pogotowia Wojennego* (War Emergency League of Women) in the Kingdom of Poland under the Russian partition.²¹ Two years later, in Kraków under the Austrian partition, *Liga Kobiet Polskich Galicji i Śląska* (League of Polish Women in Galicia and Silesia) likewise started to function. In 1918, following World War I, after Poland gained its independence from Prussia, Russia, and Austria, these two organizations joined forces under the name of the *Liga Kobiet Polskich* (League of Polish Women).²²

Beyond the name, there is little that links the interwar and postwar Leagues of Women.

Fleszarowa is the only founder of the communist-era League who had direct connections to the earlier

²⁰ Moszczeńska also worked on behalf of Piłsudski's legionaires (a military group under Józef Piłsudski, who ruled Poland from 1926 to 1935), helped form the *Związek Patriotów* (Union of Patriots), sided with nationalists, and was a member of the National Organization of Women. On Moszczeńska, see especially, Aneta Górnicka-Boratyńska, *Chcemy całego życia: Antologia polskich tekstów feministycznych z lat 1870-1939* (Warsaw: Fundacja Res Publica, 1999), 246-47; and Dufurat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej*.

²¹ For approximately 150 years, Poland was partitioned among three of its neighbors—Russia to the East, Austria to the South, and Prussia to the West.

²² On these developments, see Chojnowski, "Aktywność kobiet w życiu politycznym," 43; Dobrochna Kałwa, "Model kobiety aktywnej na tle sporów światopoglądowych: Ruch feministyczny w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym," in *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse*, 136-53, esp. 137; Dufurat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej*; Piłsudska, et al., *Wierna służba*, 46-48; Dionizja Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Od prządki do astronautki: Z dziejów kobiety polskiej, jej praca i osiągnięcie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związkowe CRZZ, 1963), chap. 10; Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," *International History Review* 1, no. 19 (February 1997): 16-31, esp. 23-24; and Mirosława Dołęgowska-Wysocka, "Liga Kobiet 1914-1918: Programy, działalność, czasopiśmiennictwo" (Ph.D. diss., Instytut Dziennikarstwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1986). Dołęgowska-Wysocka uses the name *Liga Kobiet Naczelnego Komitetu Narodowego* (League of Women of the Main National Committee) instead of the League of Polish Women in Galicia and Silesia. Mirosława Dołęgowska-Wysocka, "Liga Kobiet: Rys historyczny," n.d., personal possession of Barbara K.

group in the Kingdom of Poland.²³ The composition and goals of the two organizations differed significantly. The interwar League was a small, elitist group; the majority of its members were wives, sisters, mothers, fiancées, and friends of legionaries, a military group under Józef Piłsudski.²⁴ Although the group was concerned with gender equality, its main agenda centered on nationalism and Poland's independence. During World War I, members aided the army by running canteens, sewing military clothing, preparing meals, and taking care of wounded soldiers. Some became members of the legionnaires and fought alongside the men. After the war, the League maintained its patriotic fervor, supported Piłsudski and the Socialist Party, and participated in advocating women's emancipation.²⁵

By contrast, the founders of the post-1945 organization designed their group as a mass organization for all women living in Poland of all political backgrounds. In 1947, Sztachelska directly distinguished interwar women's organizations from SOLK by stating that "prewar women's organizations were exclusive organizations, concentrating a small number of women and mostly women from the intelligentsia," while the League brought "together women from various social circles—career women, housewives, [and] teachers, as well as peasants and workers, nonparty women, and women belonging to Political Parties."²⁶ Although SOLK members continued to exhibit some patriotism, this patriotism differed in the sense that it eventually was geared toward a socialist Poland under the guidance of the Soviet Union rather than a fully independent and nationalist Poland. Some members of the interwar League may have become SOLK members, given that SOLK became the only viable option for women activists wanting to remain in a women's group, but I have found no direct connection between the two groups.

²³ I also have found one other member, Władysława Weychert-Szymanowska, who belonged to the interwar League and later became a member of the postwar League in the city of Łódź. She was also a founder and president of the interwar *Klub Kobiet Pracujących* (Working Women's Club). Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Od prządki do astronautki*, 334; "Sławne kobiety polki: Władysława Weychert-Szymanowska," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1969): 29-32; Mroczek-Szymańska, "Pamiętamy o nich," 15; and Dufurat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej*, 9, 296.

²⁴ Dołęgowska-Wysocka, "Liga Kobiet"; and Kałwa, "Model kobiety aktywnej," 137. In 1916, combined these two groups had approximately sixteen thousand members. Dufurat, *Kobiety w kręgu lewicy niepodległościowej*, 8.

²⁵ Dołęgowska-Wysocka, "Liga Kobiet"; Kałwa, "Model kobiety aktywnej," 137; and Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Od prządki do astronautki*, 334-37.

²⁶ Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet*, 3.

The earlier League possessed more similarities to women's activism of the 1800s and early 1900s than to the post-World War II organization. Women under partitioned Poland advocated both women's rights and independence from the three foreign powers. "Freedom and equality for all—including women—was the catchword, a message very much aimed at the address of the occupying powers." The ultimate goal for many activist women was "the securing of national renewal."²⁷ Nationalism was more important than women's rights.²⁸ The post-World War II organization, in contrast, did not focus either on women's rights or nationalism but on social assistance to women and women's political involvement.

Some members currently are rethinking the League's history as a way to gain legitimacy in the postcommunist period. By claiming a past in an era prior to the onset of communism, members seek to demonstrate that the organization was not, in fact, a communist organization, but had a tradition rooted in Poland's glorious Second Republic. In an era when anything associated with communism is typically deemed anti-Polish and inherently negative, this reappropriation of the national history is an attempt to ensure the survival of the communist-era women's group. Members are not denying the organization's communist past, but they have reformulated their historical consciousness to move beyond the communist era and include another and much more acceptable period of Polish history.²⁹

²⁷ Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, "Women in Polish Society: A Historical Introduction," in *Women in Polish Society*, ed. Rudolf Jaworski and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1992), 1-29, quotation on 25. See also Helena Karczyńska ed., *Udział kobiet w polskim ruchu narodowym na Górnym Śląsku i Śląsku Cieszyńskim w XIX i XX wieku* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Instytut Śląski, 1996). On turn-of-the-century women's activism, see Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze, i feministki: Kobiety dyskurs emancypacyjny w Polsce* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo eFKa, 1999); and Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Od prządki do astronautki*.

²⁸ Nationalism was central to the women's movement in other parts of Eastern Europe as well. Katherine David, "Czech Feminists and Nationalism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy: The First in Austria," *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 3 (fall 1991): 295-309; Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884-1939* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988); and Norma L. Rudinsky, *Incipient Feminists: Women Writers in the Slovak National Revival* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1991).

²⁹ For a discussion of historical consciousness as tied to national history particularly as part of the Solidarity Movement, see Kristi S. Long, *We All Fought for Freedom: Women in Poland's Solidarity Movement* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), 11, 40.

Although there are no direct connections with interwar women's activism, many initiatives of the communist-era League resembled the agenda of the interwar women's movement.³⁰ Particularly in 1918, following national independence and the winning of the vote for Polish women, Poland witnessed a tremendous growth in women's activism. A total of forty-two women's organizations functioned during the 1920s and 1930s, ranging from feminist, occupational, and educational to religious, national, and ethnic. Most worked on a spectrum of issues.³¹ Because the post-1945 League eventually became women's only option for activism in a women's organization, undoubtedly some members from these interwar women's groups joined the postwar League. Fleszarowa, for example, had served as president of the National Organization of Women and was affiliated with the Progressive Women's Club during the interwar era.³²

Like the communist-era League, a number of interwar groups as well as women's cooperatives offered courses, demonstrations, and advice in home economics to assist women in their domestic tasks and create better and "rational" housewives.³³ Generally, as did the League, these organizations advocated equality of the sexes based on biological differences between women and men.³⁴ In other words, for most activists, women's maternal and domestic roles remained a component of the struggle for equality. These groups also stressed cooperation between parents (typically mothers) and schools, and women's "natural"

³⁰ Roman Wieruszewski has stated that the League inherited "progressive traditions of the women's movement in Poland." See Roman Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn w Polsce Ludowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1975), 205. Sociologist and League member Krystyna Wrochno has made similar claims in Krystyna Wrochno, *Woman in Poland* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1968), 86.

³¹ Maria Ciechomska, *Od Matriarchatu do feminizmu* (Poznań: Brana, 1996), 147; and Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej*, 27-28. Walczewska and Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa have placed the number at around eighty. Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet," 26; Sławomira Walczewska, "Czy kobietom w Polsce potrzebny jest feminizm?" in *Co to znaczy być kobietą w Polsce*, ed. Anna Titkow and Henryk Domański (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 1995), 245-56; and Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Od prządki do astronautki*, 355. See also Renata Siemieńska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," *Women and Politics* 6, no. 4 (winter 1986): 5-35.

³² See footnote 11.

³³ Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej*, 44, 48, 94; and Zofia Chyra-Rolicz, "Kobiety a unowocześnianie i uspołecznianie gospodarstw domowych w Polsce międzywojennej," in *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego, wiek XIX i XX*, ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1997), 249-64.

³⁴ Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej*, 30-31, 34.

moral attributes as well as their responsibility to ensure education for and morality of youth.³⁵ Charitable and philanthropic work—especially dealing with “repairing social relations, battle with illnesses that penetrate the social organism: with unemployment, alcoholism, prostitution, vagrancy, beggary, [and] criminality”—was prominent in women’s organizations prior to the First World War and expanded significantly in the interwar period. Care for mothers and children was a central component of this charitable work.³⁶ Promotion of educational opportunities for women was also not new. Educational rights was one of the central struggles for women under the partitions.³⁷ The League and the interwar National Organization of Women had similar goals dealing with employment and educational equity; assisting homeless and working women; offering courses, lectures, and activities for women and their children; and engaging in philanthropic endeavors.³⁸

The League in the immediate postwar period did not focus its attention on political matters, ideology, and propaganda to the same degree as in the stalinist period that followed. It assisted women and their families with everyday needs, particularly needs that resulted from the devastating war.³⁹ Central to League activism was organizing and developing childcare facilities and activities for children, *izby dworcowe* (railroad station accommodations),⁴⁰ homes for single women, employment opportunities for

³⁵ Ibid., chaps. 3-4.

³⁶ Ibid., chap. 5, quotation on 90.

³⁷ Siemieńska, “Women and Social Movements in Poland,” 13-14; and Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Swarc, eds., *Kobieta i edukacja: Na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, vols. 1 and 2 (Warsaw: Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1995).

³⁸ Anna Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 168. The main contrast that Reading has acknowledged is that the interwar group “promoted women for the good of the Polish Catholic Nation, [and] the postwar League of Women has promoted women for the good of the Communist Polish Nation.”

³⁹ In 1956, members frequently compared this immediate postwar period with the repressive stalinist era. They wanted to return to an activism that stressed women’s everyday needs rather than one that focused on state propaganda. Joanna Goven has also shown that the Hungarian women’s organization did not focus on political matters in the immediate postwar period. Joanna Goven, “The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-politics of Anti-feminism, 1948-1990” (Ph.D. diss, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 78.

⁴⁰ Poles were on the move following World War II, and *izby dworcowe* were set up for mothers and their children, who traveled across the country in search of loved ones lost during the war or in search of job opportunities.

women, protective labor legislation, health and hygiene, and aid to widows and orphans. In many instances, male breadwinners perished in the war, and women had to take on new responsibilities within their households. In 1946, 54.1 percent of Poland's population were women.⁴¹ They often needed assistance in finding employment, childcare, and accommodations. "Family life," as one League member stated "had to be restored," and the League tried to do just that by providing a variety of services.⁴²

In addition to helping mothers and children specifically, the League fought against alcoholism, venereal diseases, and prostitution; organized literacy courses; offered home economics instruction; and developed informational, legal, and hygiene clinics. In the realm of cultural activities, the group organized readings, exhibits, and contests; held theater and music productions; created libraries; and offered vacations and trips to women and their families. These activities resembled many of the programs that interwar women's groups offered. SOLK also participated in various efforts to rebuild war-ravaged Poland.⁴³

Some interwar organizations were directly tied to political parties, as was the League in the postwar period. The National Organization of Women, largely composed of Catholic women, was supported by the right-wing National Democratic Party. The Socialist Party sponsored women's groups that focused on work, sports, and social work. The Polish Peasant Party, Socialist Party, and interwar Communist Party all had women's sections.⁴⁴ Even though SOLK initiatives were not primarily political, the League was tied directly to the political system that was evolving at the time.⁴⁵ At one of the first

⁴¹ Malgorzata Fidelis, "Reinventing Gender: Women Industrial Workers and the State in Postwar Poland, 1945-1956" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, in process), chap. 1.

⁴² Janina Suska-Jankowska, interview by Anna Reading, in Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism*, 169.

⁴³ On these initiatives in the Białystok region specifically, see Ratman-Liwierska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 121-22.

⁴⁴ Siemieńska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," 15; and Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, *Od prądki do astronautki*, 356-66.

⁴⁵ Zofia Sokół has argued that the League was not political until 1951, but given the nature of how it was formed and the League's consolidation of parties (to be discussed in chapter 2), her assessment is not fully accurate. Zofia Sokół, "Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny na łamach prasy kobiecej (1945-1990)," in *Polskie oblicza feminizmu: Materiały z konferencji "Polskie oblicza feminizmu" Uniwersytet Warszawski 8 marca 1999 roku*, ed. Weronika Chańska and Danuta Ulicka (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki, Uniwersytetu

meetings of the Provisional Administration, founders reportedly characterized the organization in the following way: “The League of Women is an answer to women’s requests to organize, it is also an expression of the needs of the state, which is interested in creating a wide women’s movement that is tied to the new system. The League of Women is a nonparty organization, but not apolitical.”⁴⁶ The League, according to its founders, was nonparty since women from various political factions and *bezpartyjne* (those not affiliated with any party) were allowed to join. The organization was also political (although many of its members were not), and one of its main goals, as its first statute indicated, was “to incorporate women into the political-social life of the country.”⁴⁷ From its inception and particularly after consolidation under the Communist Party in 1948, it advocated Communist Party initiatives and ideology. Still, the degree of politicization was minimal compared to the following era during which the League focused on propaganda and party-state-directed initiatives.

Although League documents do not directly make connections to interwar women’s activism, SOLK members may have adopted some of these strategies either as a result of personal previous experience and beliefs, general knowledge of such programs, or simply because these are the types of initiatives that women’s organizations in general take on. Like the interwar women’s movement, SOLK combined feminist, occupational, educational, political, and charitable strategies. The communist period was not simply an anomaly stuck between the interwar and the postcommunist eras. As Anna Reading has stated: “The League of Women and its rural counterpart the Circles of Rural Housewives are not the faulty shuttles of communism: both picked up the tangled threads of mainstream Polish feminism from before the

Warszawskiego, 2000), 66-85, esp. 73. One of SOLK’s goals from its inception was cooperation with the party-state, but it was not as central to its activism as these other initiatives.

⁴⁶ Romana Lewandowska, “Założenia programowe Ligi Kobiet i ich realizacja (1),” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1985): 10-14, quotation on 10.

⁴⁷ Mirosława Olszewska, “30 lat działalności Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1975): 3-30, quotation on 3.

war.”⁴⁸ Women’s activism in the communist era did not evolve out of thin air. It adapted earlier forms of women’s activism to the changing postwar environment.⁴⁹

Central Controls, Local Initiatives: Maneuvering in the Party-State

Accounts of communist-era Eastern European women’s organizations typically characterize them as centralized, bureaucratic, and top heavy. The League was no exception. Like other Eastern European women’s groups, it was a centralized organization that received direction from above—nationally from the League’s Central Administration and regionally from provincial administrations as well as national and local Communist Party leaders. Local chapters regularly reported to upper-level administrations and party leaders. Party representatives were always present and spoke at national and provincial League conferences, as well as many smaller and more local gatherings. It is difficult to assess, however, to what degree lower levels of the organization followed upper-level League and party directives. Criticism included in numerous reports suggest that chapters often did not adhere to these directives largely due to disorganization and limited numbers of active members.⁵⁰

At the same time, as recent scholarship on Eastern Europe has shown, control from “above” was not ubiquitous. Historians today are rethinking and reconfiguring the totalitarian model in conceptualizing

⁴⁸ Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism*, 168.

⁴⁹ A few scholars have explored the connections between the communist period and the interwar period more generally. Padraic Kenney, for example, has argued that to understand dynamics in the stalinist period, we cannot study it in isolation from prewar dynamics. See Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 11, 335. See also David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); Hana Havelková, “A Few Prefeminist Thoughts,” in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 62-73; and Sharon L. Wolchik, “The Precommunist Legacy, Economic Development, Social Transformation, and Women’s Roles in Eastern Europe,” in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 31-43.

⁵⁰ In the case of the *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej* (Union of Polish Youth), Joanna Kochanowicz also has argued that coordinating activism of the group with the Communist Party and within the Union itself was difficult. Directives did not produce actual results on the ground. Joanna Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie: Stalinowska próba modernizacji opornej rzeczywistości* (Warsaw: Trio, 2000), chap. 6.

the communist period. In the case of the League, individual chapters exhibited signs of local initiative as well as centralism.⁵¹ Certain programs and activities were more successful in or appropriate for different regions; and chapters sometimes decided on their own forms of activism that fit the needs of their membership and/or communities. By characterizing these groups predominantly as centralized and bureaucratic, most accounts have also portrayed them as largely static. But in fact the League was in constant flux. Where League chapters could function; which women's groups worked under the League; and what types of sections, departments, and committees the organization developed varied over time. Some forms of activism quickly took hold while others gradually perished or were dissolved deliberately.

As with all officially recognized organizations of communist party-states, the League was affiliated with and often directed by the Communist Party. Until 1953, it functioned under the supervision of the Women's Division, a branch of the Communist Party charged with "work among women."⁵² Party leaders decided to redirect "work among women" and dissolve the Women's Division, because it, they argued, focused too narrowly on women's issues rather than on general party goals, while other branches within the party largely ignored women. After this dissolution, the League operated under the Department of Organization and Propaganda. In 1966, following the party's resolution to separate the Circles of Rural Housewives and women's cooperatives from the League, party officials formed a *Rada Kobieta* (Women's Council), a party branch that was to oversee work of all women's groups.⁵³ Party leaders on the national and provincial levels gave the League directives, which the organization, at least on the upper levels, generally followed. For the most part, the group did not stray from the party line and in fact advocated

⁵¹ Ratman-Liwerska has stated that especially in the immediate postwar period, the League in the Białystok region functioned without directives, specific programs, or a statute. Members decided the forms of activism on the local level. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 121. Kochanowicz has made similar arguments about localism versus centralism in the case of the Union of Polish Youth in the stalinist era. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*.

⁵² Women's divisions functioned on the national, provincial, and district levels. In addition to overseeing the League's work, they also directed "work among women" in workplaces and agricultural cooperatives. For a chart of the women's divisions' structure, see "Struktura organizacyjna pracy wśród kobiet," n.d., File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety," sygn. 237/V-72, AAN.

⁵³ Interestingly, though, one of my interviewees had no idea what I was talking about when I mentioned this Council, which leads me to believe that it was largely ineffective and invisible. Urszula P., interview by author, Łódź, 27 March 2000.

official party policy among women. The League also provided the party with regular reports on its activities and made its internal bulletins available to officials.

At League national and provincial conferences and many of its local meetings and celebratory events (e.g., in celebration of Mother's Day or International Women's Day), party representatives (often the Central Committee's party secretary at national conferences) attended and presented formal speeches delineating women's and the League's role within a socialist state. The conferences were formal and "extremely stiff," as Irena H., a longtime League and Communist Party member in the city of Opole, stated. Discussions and speeches were controlled if only by the mere presence of party officials.⁵⁴ During these meetings, Bożena N. asserted, League leaders had to begin the gatherings with statements about the benefits of socialism. "If we did not have this introduction, about how wonderful socialism was, then we would not have held the congress . . . because no one would have allowed it." Only after this type of introduction, she maintained, did the League move to discussions of "issues that the organization authentically dealt with."⁵⁵ According to these members, the organization followed the party line at meetings because officials were present and expected these types of statements and not because members necessarily believed in such pronouncements.⁵⁶ Centralization and control by party leaders played out at these official gatherings.

Financially, the League was both centralized and localized. In part, the party and official state publisher subsidized the organization. The League was exempt from various taxes, and the state typically provided chapters and administrations with spaces in which to function.⁵⁷ Other regular monies came from membership dues and the sale of League publications. Locally, chapters raised money sporadically in a variety of ways. Some organized fundraising dances and other festivities, some sold food at sport stadiums,

⁵⁴ Irena H., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000.

⁵⁵ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000. Urszula P. made a similar assessment, saying that it was difficult to ignore official politics at these meetings. Urszula P., interview.

⁵⁶ Party leaders likewise did not necessarily believe in their own statements about socialism, but to maintain their positions within the state structure, they were expected to make these pronouncements.

⁵⁷ Since the transformation in 1989, the League no longer receives state subsidies and largely relies on dues, individual fundraising initiatives, and financial assistance from abroad. Because of these changes, chapters and administrations lost most of their locales.

and others cooked and served food at various banquets or held raffles.⁵⁸ Members typically designated money raised locally for local events and assistance of women and children. Local fundraising and how that money was spent varied from chapter to chapter and was not directed from above. Through these funds, the League paid for a few employees, particularly on the national and regional levels, for the upkeep of facilities, and for activities and programs.

Upper levels of the organization were bureaucratic and centralized and their structure resembled the party's structure. The Central Administration, like the party's Central Committee, was the national organizational body made up of roughly 90 to 120 members from all over the country. Out of this Administration, between fifteen and twenty members, including Administration officers, made up the Presidium, the core of the League's leadership. The Administration oversaw the work of the provinces, reported to the party, and served as the main transmission between the party's Central Committee and regional League administrations. Provincial administrations, composed of between twenty-five and forty women, oversaw the work of lower-level city administrations and worked cooperatively with provincial party committees.⁵⁹ Members of provincial bodies also held regional conferences, chose delegates for national congresses, and elected officers. Many served on the Central Administration. City administrations, in turn, supervised the activism of neighborhood administrations, which oversaw the work of individual chapters.⁶⁰

The League developed a variety of sections, committees, and collectives, some of which became visible and active, while others remained small, inactive, or altogether dissolved. The Section of Lawyers,

⁵⁸ In the Białystok region, the League, for example, organized raffles, collected funds, and held dances. Ratman-Liwierska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 122.

⁵⁹ On these numbers, see ZGLK, *Statut Ligi Kobiet* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1967), 20, File "Liga Kobiet, 1951-1967," sygn. I 3b, Dokumenty Życia Społecznego, Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw (hereafter DZS, BN); and "Statut Ligi Kobiet Polskich," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1989): insert, 14.

⁶⁰ This is the general structure of the organization. Depending on the period, other administrations also functioned. Until 1975, for example, provinces were further divided into *powiaty* (districts or counties) and a few villages comprised a *gmina* (parish) until 1972. For the purposes of this project, I will omit a discussion of these other administrations. Financial boards functioned on all of these levels; like the administrations, the Central Financial Board oversaw the work of provincial boards and so on. This structure resembles the structure of other communist-era organizations as well, particularly the Union of Polish Youth. See Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 32-35.

founded in 1959, became an important League body. Female attorneys who belonged to the Section provided women with advice, published regular articles in League bulletins, and worked on and popularized legislative changes.⁶¹ More than other sections, this one served both the state and women. It provided women with ongoing valuable information about their legal rights and responsibilities as well as changing legislation. At the same time, the Section worked on behalf of the state by spreading official information to women.

The *Komitet d/s Gospodarstwa Domowego* (Committee for Home Economics Affairs), founded in 1957, was by far the League's most prominent and popular national committee. Its programs focused on preparing women to become home economics instructors, providing courses, testing new appliances, and publishing brochures and a periodical.⁶² The Committee was national, but local chapters decided individually what types of courses, demonstrations, and lectures to offer based on local women's needs and desires. The Committee's stress on women's prescribed gender roles as housewives, wives, and mothers, combined with its popularity, suggests the League's attachment to women's traditionally accepted position.

Until 1966, the Circles of Rural Housewives and chapters within women's cooperatives functioned under the League's leadership, although both also had their own leaders, chapters, and conferences. They held collective membership in the League, as well as individual membership in the Circles of Rural Housewives and cooperatives.⁶³ These groups worked on some mutual programs with the League—such as fighting illiteracy, seeking work for women, and organizing festivities for various holidays—but they also developed their own programs specific to their constituents. Although the rural

⁶¹ By 1966, this Section had over two hundred members and participated in the *Międzynarodowa Federacja Kobiet Zawodów Prawniczych* (International Federation of Women Lawyers). Janina Barcikowska, "Sprawozdanie Głównej Komisji Rewizyjnej," in *Nowy etap działalności Ligi Kobiet: Materiały z obrad IV Krajowego zjazdu Ligi Kobiet, 26-28 czerwca 1966 r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1966), 38-46, esp. 44. Other sections included a Housing Section, Section of Pedagogues, and Section of Physicians, but none became as popular as the Section of Lawyers. The League also formed such collectives as a Collective of Historians, Collective of Architects, and a Reading Collective.

⁶² This Committee was a member of the *Międzynarodowa Federacja Nauczanie Gospodarstwa Domowego* (International Federation of Home Economics Education). Chapter 4 will include a more detailed discussion of this Committee.

⁶³ Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*, 205.

women's organization and cooperatives composed a large portion of the League's membership, neither group was at the core of League activism. When party leaders decided officially to separate these two groups from the League in 1966, they already had been largely autonomous. In fact, League leaders showed no concern over this membership loss (unlike the loss of workplace chapters), since they recognized that this separation had already existed in reality.

The *Organizacja Rodzin Wojskowych* (Organization of Army Families) and the *Kola Rodzin Milicyjnych* (Circles of Militia Families) were two other semi-autonomous groups that functioned as part of the League.⁶⁴ Delegates from these two groups attended League meetings and conferences and participated in its programs and festivities but also held their own functions and organized initiatives specific to their communities. Wives of officers as well as female employees of the militia and army were able to join. Such semi-autonomous groups did not function for other occupations that were generally reserved for men (such as mining or logging), thereby suggesting that a women's organization was especially important in these two arms of state control. Non-working wives of other types of workers were expected to join residential chapters. These two groups served women by offering needed female support and a variety of activities for children, and simultaneously aided the state by controlling the behavior of officers' wives. As members of the Organization of Army Families and Circles of Militia Families, women built up female support networks in the frequent absence of their husbands, particularly in the case of the army organization.⁶⁵ As Irena H., a member of the militia group, claimed, officers' wives also had a special role in understanding their husbands' needs to keep secrets and internal policies from them. The support that she received from other wives aided her in being supportive of her husband's work.⁶⁶

The smallest component of the League was the chapter. Depending on the period, chapters functioned in such areas as apartment buildings, neighborhood communities, workplaces, and state offices

⁶⁴ The Organization of Army Families was formed in 1946 under a different name. In 1959 its name changed and it became part of the League. Some of the first chapters of the militia women's group were created in 1945, but they officially became the Circles of Militia Families in 1963. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 145-47.

⁶⁵ Helena P., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000.

⁶⁶ Irena H., interview by author, 18 May 2000.

and institutions. Some women also formed chapters based on occupations or special interests. Although League, party, and Women's Division representatives, especially in the stalinist period, attempted to recruit women into the organization, chapter formation depended not so much on central directives but on women's individual interest.⁶⁷ To form an individual chapter, at least five women were needed.⁶⁸

From the League's inception, most chapters functioned in workplaces and residential areas. Twice, however, party officials dissolved the League's presence in the work environment. In 1952/1953, party leaders ordered all workplace chapters to break up as part of its overhaul of "work among women" and stressed the need to strengthen the organization in residential areas and incorporate more housewives into the League.⁶⁹ In 1956, League representatives called for the reinstatement of workplace chapters, reclaiming the group's presence in places of employment. After only one decade, party officials once again abolished League activism in the workplace due to, according to numerous League members, women's growing and visible discontent with worksite conditions and the uneasiness that this caused for party officials. Yet, even though workplace chapters dissolved officially in 1966, some worksite groups continued their activism. Not until 1981 did chapters in places of employment formally begin to function again at the initiation of League members.⁷⁰

These transitions demonstrate that party leaders did have significant control over the organization, especially during more repressive periods—the stalinist era and the late 1960s when party secretary Władysław Gomułka began to lose popularity and exhibited greater authority. In both periods, officials directed the League to abolish its workplace chapters. These transformations also show that in periods when Poles in general visibly demanded changes—in this case 1956 and the 1980s—the League likewise

⁶⁷ In some instances, coercion did play a factor, but particularly following the stalinist period, women made these decisions largely on their own for a variety of reasons.

⁶⁸ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

⁶⁹ On this decision, see, for example, "Notatka Wydziału Kobięcego KC PZPR w sprawie zmiany kierownictwa Partii pracą wśród kobiet," 29 September 1952, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobięcy," sygn. 237/XV-3; "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii pracą wśród kobiet," 9 January 1953, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobięcy," sygn. 237/XV-8; and "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet," June 1953, File "KC PZPR Wydział Propagandy i Agitacji," sygn. 237/VIII-76, all in AAN.

⁷⁰ Chapter 5 addresses these transitions in more detail.

embraced the opportunity for change in ways that defied decisions made by officials earlier. In these instances, party leaders probably viewed League members' demands as less threatening to their ultimate authority than demands made by Poles in general. This duality illustrates that depending on the era, party and League leaders as well as local members (who refused to dissolve their workplace chapters, for example) had control over where the organization functioned.

When the group functioned in places of employment, it had chapters in various types of workplaces where numerous women worked—such as hospitals, schools, and local administrative offices—but the most active chapters were located in factories that employed many women. The textile industry, especially in Łódź, for example, had some of the most involved chapters. The League represented women on the shop floor and dealt with numerous everyday problems that female employees faced in both the workplace and the home. The organization helped women workers when they were fired unfairly, faced difficulties at work, or wanted to improve their work skills. Members also assisted women in finding appropriate childcare, seeking medical attention, and alleviating financial strains. They even intervened in marital disputes and helped divorced women obtain child support. League leaders of workplace chapters also worked closely with trade unions and other factory administrative bodies.

In both residential and workplace units, approximately once per month the group organized such activities as home economics courses and offered lectures by experts on a variety of topics that were deemed important for women, including raising children, health and hygiene, and work discipline. For International Women's Day and Mother's Day, chapters held festivities; around other holidays, they planned parties and entertainment, especially for children. During summer months, they organized day trips to historical sites and local parks for women and their families and overnight trips to summer camps for youth. The organization assisted families in times of crisis and provided legal and advisory services. Members who functioned in residential areas cooperated with local party officials and often served on residential governing bodies.

Chapters undoubtedly followed directives from upper levels of the League and party officials, but at the same time, they exhibited signs of local initiative, based on local needs as well as League members'

desires and levels of activism. As one member stated, “each chapter has its own program of activism, adapted to the community’s needs.”⁷¹ According to a delegate at a 1975 national conference, for example, the needs of a community with one-family homes differed from those of a residential area made up of apartment buildings; and the needs of a community filled with youth differed from one that was predominantly elderly. As a result, in the 1970s, chapters started to organize *ośrodki* (centers) based on the needs of specific communities. In the city of Szczecin, for instance, the League focused on adoption and single motherhood, while in the town of Ostrów Świętokrzyski, it assisted the elderly.⁷² Local chapters decided what types of home economics courses and presentations to offer and what issues to address in lectures given by experts based on the desires of local members. Chapters also decided on what types of projects to launch. In the city of Piotrków Trybunalski, a glass works factory chapter, for instance, held a contest of cleanliness in the home and raised money for building a new school. In a factory that manufactured fire-proof materials in Radom, the League helped remodel apartments for single women and installed benches and tables in the women’s coatroom.⁷³

Central League and party leaders frequently complained about inactivity of individual chapters and even of some provincial administrations, which were supposed to function as part of the organization’s leadership.⁷⁴ Such complaints were especially prominent in the mid-1950s when members began to criticize openly the group’s stalinist-era activism. In her speech at the second national conference in 1957, League president Alicja Musiałowa complained that some chapters had fallen apart and some administrations had ceased to direct League work. Even though it would be difficult to overcome the problems of the previous

⁷¹ Elżbieta Banasiak, “Czy tylko babskie gadanie?” *Przyjaciółka*, no. 3 (27 July 1980): 3.

⁷² “Obszerne fragmenty: Wypowiedzi delegatek na VI Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet,” Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 4-5 (1975): 27-109, esp. 35-39.

⁷³ For some examples of these activities and programs, see Janina Iwanicka, “Wiele pochwał i nieco uwag krytycznych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (1960): 24-29; Janina Iwanicka, “Brawo kobiety z huty ‘Kara,’” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1960): 43-45; and Zofia Lenart, “Współpraca koła LK z Komisją Kobiecą,” *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (1960): 50-52.

⁷⁴ The Union of Polish Youth experienced similar problems of inactivity. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*.

era, she stated, the League needed to be rebuilt and strengthened.⁷⁵ At the third national conference in 1962, Central Administration secretary Stanisława Zawadecka indicated that these problems were not fully solved. Many district administrations, she claimed, did not even exist; instead there were only individual chapters.⁷⁶ Chapters and even administrative bodies did not function everywhere at all times as party and League leaders had hoped. Women created and dissolved chapters based on local and individual activism, not on central directives.

The League was dependent on and affiliated with the Communist Party. It worked under the supervision of a party department, typically followed party directives, and was structured like the party. This should not be surprising since organizations independent of the party were not allowed to function legally or visibly in the communist bloc. The League's direct link to the party, however, does not mean that individual members and chapters did not take independent initiative or that they always followed centralized directives. By depicting the organization solely as centralized and bureaucratic we overlook how the organization functioned on lower levels—in provinces, cities, and individual chapters. The League received directives from above while simultaneously following initiative from below. As an organization within a communist party-state, the League was both part of the authoritative structure and part of the community of women. Such binaries as above and below or central and local are inadequate since they leave little room for maneuvering, when in fact these types of groups functioned from both directions and from in between.

⁷⁵ Alicja Musiałowa, "Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej wygłoszony na II Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet," in *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet (materiały): Warszawa, 11-13 lipiec 1957r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1957), 3-19. After being the vice-director of the Women's Division, Musiałowa served as League president from 1950 to 1965. She was also a deputy to Parliament between 1952 and 1969 and held other national party positions as well. Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy*, 400.

⁷⁶ Stanisława Zawadecka, "Referat: Tow. Stanisława Zawadecka, Sekretarz Generalny Zarz. Gł. Ligi Kobiet," in *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet 17-19 luty 1962 r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1962), 35-52, quotation on 35. President of the League from 1965, when Musiałowa stepped down, until 1968, Zawadecka also was a prominent member of the party, serving in the secretariat of the National Front specifically in the 1960s. Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy*, 307.

Not Just Elderly Party Members: A Diverse Membership

The League quickly grew from its 1945 beginnings into a mass women's organization. Table 1 shows the growth of the organization from approximately 190,000 in 1946 to over two million in 1962.⁷⁷ Statistics from official documents must be taken cautiously, since communist systems are known to have published elevated or false data. Chapters may have embellished their numbers to appear successful in the eyes of provincial and central administrations. As one interviewee stated, women who died were not always taken off membership lists and reports were to indicate how many new members entered the League and not how many left the group. Membership numbers therefore may have been inflated.⁷⁸ These numbers also do not reflect the level of members' activism. These statistics are compiled from various party and League documents and publications as well as secondary sources. These sources do not provide membership numbers for all years and do not always break up that membership by numbers of chapters. Although this is a rough sketch, these official numbers are useful. They show that the League was a large national organization whose membership fluctuated.

In 1960, about 13 percent of the roughly fifteen million women living in Poland in both urban and rural areas were members.⁷⁹ The sharp drop in numbers of chapters from 1950 to 1962 is due to the dissolution of workplace chapters in 1953.⁸⁰ With the reorganization of the League in 1966 when the party

⁷⁷ Stanisława Zawadecka, "Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet i wytyczne dalszej pracy," Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, *Nasza praca*, no. 6-7 (March-April 1951): 42-62, esp. 56. For additional statistics, see KC PZPR, *W sprawie pracy wśród kobiet: Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR* (Warsaw: KC PZPR, 1950), 5; *Kobieta w Polsce: Dane Statystyczne* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej, June 1968), 179; and ZGLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet za lata 1962-1966* (Warsaw: June 1966), 4-8, File "Liga Kobiet, 1951-1967," sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN.

⁷⁸ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000. Kochanowicz also has maintained that the Union of Polish Youth was significantly smaller than official statistics claimed. Chapters often did not function, members were listed more than once, activists who left the organization were not crossed off the list, and the group outright lied. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 62-69.

⁷⁹ On Poland's women's population, see *Kobieta w Polsce* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1975), 3.

⁸⁰ In 1962, the official membership stood at 2,146,200 women in 27,680 chapters throughout Poland, with 550,000 members in 10,000 workplace chapters; 234,000 in 12,230 Circles of Rural Housewives' chapters; 28,500 in 1,500 *Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne* (National Agricultural Farms) chapters; 31,000 in 1,000

directed the organization to function solely in residential areas in cities, membership dropped significantly to below five hundred thousand as the League lost members in workplaces, cooperatives, and rural areas and struggled to build up residential chapters. In 1970, it stood at a low of 384,000,⁸¹ and by 1975, the official number was five hundred thousand.⁸² In 1974, women accounted for some 9.5 million residents of urban areas; roughly 5 percent of those women belonged to the organization in the 1970s.⁸³ The organization lost members in the early 1980s (as did the party), when participation in any party-affiliated group or institution became increasingly unpopular.⁸⁴ The number of members increased by 1985, largely due to a reinstatement of workplace chapters.⁸⁵ The League never regained the membership that it had lost

residential chapters; 20,000 in 450 Organization of Army Families chapters; 350,000 in 2,500 cooperatives; and 932,700 members in rural collectives. As these numbers indicate, more than one-half of members were rural women, even though the League generally stressed urban issues over rural ones, particularly after stalinism. Although these women were official League members, their activism was largely separate from urban League activism. *Rocznik polityczny i gospodarczy* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 1962), 152; “Uchwała III-go Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet,” in *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*, 111-19, esp. 114; and *Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet w latach 1957-1961* (Warsaw: February 1962), 4-14, esp. 7, File “Liga Kobiet, 1951-1967,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN. The number that sociologist Renata Siemieńska provides for 1962 is quite a bit higher—over 3.5 million. See Renata Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka: Kobiety w życiu publicznym w Polsce* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Socjologii, 1990), 178.

⁸¹ Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka*, 178; and *Kobieta w Polsce*, 96.

⁸² Edward Babiuch, “Premówienie Sekretarza KC PZPR tow. Edwarda Babiucha,” Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Conference, 10-13, esp. 10; and “Uchwała VI Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet: Główne kierunki działalności społeczno-wychowawczej LK na lata 1975-1978,” in *ibid.*, 97-106, esp. 104. Siemieńska has the number at about 450,000 for 1975. Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka*, 178. This growth between 1970 and 1975 shows that membership following the transformation probably fell well below four hundred thousand.

⁸³ *Kobieta w Polsce*, 3.

⁸⁴ “Liga Kobiet Polskich w liczbach,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1986): 31-33, esp. 31. The numbers that Siemieńska provides are slightly different, but she likewise points to these fluctuations in membership. Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka*, 178. Party membership overall in the Polish population decreased during these years, and some League members likewise opted to drop out of the party. Danuta B., for example, left the party in the early 1980s and Marysia P. left in 1986. Danuta B., interview by author, Nowy Targ, 2 June 2000; and Marysia P., interview by author, Nowy Targ, 2 June 2000. Prominent League and party member, Zofia Wasilkowska, left in 1981 and became involved in the opposition. *Moldawa, Ludzie władzy*, 437.

⁸⁵ Between 1982 and 1984, for example, 2,634 new workplace chapters were organized with a total of 114,102 new members. The majority of these new chapters were formed in the provinces of Katowice, Kielce, and Łódź, all industrial areas. In ten provinces, workplace chapters actually decreased. See “Rośnie siła kół zakładowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1985): 8-10, esp. 8. By 1987, the number stood at 566,078

in 1966. For the remainder of the communist period membership fluctuated between four and six hundred thousand.

Year	Number of Members	Number of Chapters
1946	190,000	2,000
1949	1,500,000	30,000
1950	2,000,000	40,000
1962	2,146,200	27,680
1966	Below 500,000	No data
1970	384,000	No data
1975	500,000	No data
1983	417,709	No data
1985	511,345	No data
1987	566,078	11,367

Table 1 League Membership

Who were the women who joined the League? By piecing together various League documents and publications, a general (if incomplete) sketch of members' party affiliation, occupation, social/class status, education, and age is possible. Even though many members portrayed the League as nonparty, especially during the stalinist period, the organization often listed members' party affiliation in official reports, conference proceedings, and a host of other documents, showing that the League was indeed concerned about whether or not a member belonged to the Communist Party.⁸⁶ From these statistics, we can conclude

members in 11,367 chapters, with 363,410 of those members in 6,633 workplace chapters. "Koło Ligi Kobiet Polskich współgospodarzem zakładu pracy," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1987): 27-30, esp. 28.

⁸⁶ Some sources that provide party affiliation statistics include "Sprawozdanie: Wydziału Kobiecego Warszawskiego wojewódzkiego Komitetu PZPR za m-c styczeń 1949 r.," January 1949, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiecy—KW Warszawa," sygn. 237/XV-25; "Sprawozdanie: Z działalności Wydziału Kobiecego KW PZPR za m-c wrzesień 1949 r.," 10 October 1949, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiecy—KW Kraków," sygn. 237/XV-15; "Sprawozdanie: Wydziału Kobiecego KW PZPR w Łodzi za miesiąc styczeń 1949 r.," January 1949, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiecy—KW Łódź," sygn. 237/XV-18; "Ocena przebiegu zebrań sprawozdawczo-wyborczych Ligi Kobiet w świetle zainteresowania i pomocy ze strony P.O.P., Łódź, 15 luty 1952 r.," 15 February 1952, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiecy—KW Łódź," sygn. 237/XV-17, all in AAN; "Ankiety członkiń LKP," 1978, File "Zarząd Wojewódzki Ligi Kobiet Polskich Częstochowa," sygn. 64, Archiwum Państwowy w Częstochowie, Częstochowa (hereafter APC); Wydział Organizacyjny ZGLK, "Informacja o przebiegu wojewódzkich zjazdów Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (1974): 3-17, esp. 13-14; "Sprawozdanie Zarządu Wojewódzkiego Ligi Kobiet za okres kadencji od dnia 25 maja 1970 do 31 lipca 1974 r.," in *Materiały na VI Wojewódzki Zjazd Sprawozdawczo-wyborczy Ligi Kobiet w Szczecinie* (Szczecin: Liga Kobiet, October 1974), 1-39, esp. 31-32, 37, File "Liga Kobiet, 1968," sygn. 13b, DZS, BN; and Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 241-42.

that party membership increased the higher up in the League structure one looks, although undoubtedly these numbers varied somewhat based on the region of the country and the year. Among all League members, Communist Party membership was lower than in upper-level positions. Roughly over 50 percent (and in some cases as high as 75 percent) of Central and provincial administration members and under 50 percent (and in some cases as low as 20 percent) of rank-and-file members were affiliated with the Communist Party. A handful of other parties were represented in much smaller numbers. The majority of local chapter members were *bezpartyjne* (nonparty members).⁸⁷

Provincial Communist Party committees and the Central Committee always had to approve the presidents of League provincial administrations and the Central Administration prior to a change of guard in those positions. With these top leaders, the League had to justify why it wanted a specific woman, especially in the case of a nonparty member, to hold a top-level position. It typically was easier for the organization to elevate a party member in good standing to these presidential positions.⁸⁸ As a result, most provincial administration presidents belonged to the party, and all but one (Irena Sztachelska, SOLK's first president) Central Administration presidents were party members (some in upper-level party positions).

As the League has claimed throughout its existence, it did have many nonparty women in its ranks. It was not solely a party organization composed of Communist Party members. In fact, in some chapters and administrations, nonparty women outnumbered those who belonged to the party. Given the nature of the uneven documents, assessing definitive numbers of party and nonparty members is difficult, yet they provide a glimpse of the make-up based on party affiliation. Furthermore, as Wanda K. and Barbara K. stated, at certain moments of Polish history, "everyone was entering the party, just like

⁸⁷ See, for example, "Informacja ewidencji ZM i KW LK oraz stopnia upartyjnienia członkiń Ligi Kobiet w woj. Częstochowskim na dzień 30.IX.1979 r.," 30 September 1979, File "Informacje ZWLK przekazywane do KW PZPR," 1979-1980, File "Zarząd Wojewódzki Ligi Kobiet Polskich Częstochowa," sygn. 72, APC; "XI Zjazd Wojewódzki Ligi Kobiet Polskich w Krakowie, dnia czerwca 1986 r.: Sprawozdanie Zarządu Wojewódzkiego Ligi Kobiet Polskich w Województwie Miejskim Krakowskim za lata 1982-1986," File "Liga Kobiet," in personal possession of Barbara K.; and "Liga Kobiet Polskich w liczbach," 32.

⁸⁸ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000; Łęcznarowiczowa, interview; and Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, interview by author, Warsaw, 7 March 2000.

Solidarity later,” so party membership did not mean much.⁸⁹ Danuta B. and Marysia P. maintained that they joined the party “for bread.” Danuta stated that “everyone joined because they were told that things would be better for them.” Once she joined the party, she received an apartment. Marysia advanced at work because of her party affiliation.⁹⁰ Party membership did not necessarily mean party loyalty, and nonparty membership did not necessarily indicate disloyalty. This traditional dichotomy of “Us” and “Them” in Eastern European historiography is inadequate and often false, as historian Dariusz Jarosz has argued.⁹¹ Holding a party membership card or belonging to the League did not automatically make one a communist ideologue.⁹²

In addition to party affiliation, the League often broke down membership by occupation, social status, and level of education, indicating that these designations were likewise important. In all national conference proceedings, the League listed the new Central Administration members and often included some information about women’s jobs, education, and/or social background. An article from 1947 in the popular women’s magazine *Kobieta* (Woman) claimed that in the past, mostly wealthy women were involved in social work and women’s activism. In the postwar period, in contrast, “in League chapters there are teachers, workers, lawyers, engineers, doctors, housewives, [and] clerical workers. There are women of different ages and different occupations.” Even the poorest and most overworked women, the article maintained, could become active in the League’s social work.⁹³ The organization was indeed composed of women from various occupations and educational levels. At the 1966 conference, for example, 652 delegates attended—59 women from the medical field (30 doctors, 18 nurses, 5 midwives, and 6 medical laboratory assistants); 49 lawyers; 104 teachers; 223 managers of workplaces and various administrative

⁸⁹ Wanda K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000; and Barbara K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000.

⁹⁰ Danuta B., interview; and Marysia P., interview.

⁹¹ Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm, 1948-1956* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2000), 232-33.

⁹² Kochanowicz has stated that even in the case of the youth organization, which was supposedly the vanguard of the party, membership did not mean support of the communist system. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 139-40.

⁹³ “Szkola pracy społecznej,” *Kobieta*, no. 8 (January 1947): 3-4, quotation on 3.

bodies; 12 presidents and vice presidents of cooperatives; 20 engineers and technicians; 81 economists; and 39 nonworking women, as well as blue-collar workers and rural women.⁹⁴ The Nowa Huta district administration included a principal of an elementary school, an assistant prosecutor, a technician in the Combine, teachers, a chemist, an attorney, directors in various firms, and a few nonemployed, retired, and blue-collar workers.⁹⁵ In the early 1960s, 629 out of 738 (85.2 percent) members of provincial administrations worked outside the home.⁹⁶ The majority of members finished a secondary or higher education, and as would be expected, in leadership positions, members had a higher level of education than did average rank-and-file members.⁹⁷

Especially in the stalinist period when socialist ideology dictated a deliberate turn to workers and peasants, social/class status was an important and frequently included classification. In 1949, a party leader from Kraków criticized the League for continuing to be a middle-class organization that “stressed its apoliticism.” He warned that “if we do not take up lively work among women, then our enemies will take it up.” In response to his criticism, a League representative stated that the group had already begun to improve this situation by ridding itself of middle-class and enemy elements. In their place, the League brought in “comrade-workers.”⁹⁸ Particularly under stalinism, League leaders indeed were concerned with

⁹⁴ “Wstęp,” in *Nowy etap działalności*, 4-5, quotation on 4. Interestingly, the League did not provide the actual number of workers and rural women but simply stated that they were also represented. They accounted for no more than 65 delegates probably due to the 1966 transformation.

⁹⁵ “Wykaz członkin Zarządu: Zarządu Dzielnicowego Ligi Kobiet w Nowej Hucie,” n.d., File “Zarząd Dzielnicowy Ligi Kobiet w Nowej Hucie,” in personal possession of Barbara K. Although no date is given for this document it is probably from the late 1970s or later based on birth dates of some of the women listed.

⁹⁶ *Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet w latach 1957-1961*, 4-14, esp. 9.

⁹⁷ For some statistics on education, see “Wykaz członkin Zarządu”; “XI Zjazd Wojewódzki Ligi Kobiet Polskich w Krakowie”; *Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet w latach 1957-1961*, 4; and Wydział Organizacyjny ZGLK, “Informacja o przebiegu wojewódzkich zjazdów Ligi Kobiet,” 13-14.

⁹⁸ M. Rybicki, “Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW z dnia 29 grudnia 1949r,” 29 December 1949, File “Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR w Krakowie Egzekutywa, 27 XII 1948 – 31 XII 1949,” sygn. PZPR KW Kr 188, Archiwum Państwowy w Krakowie, Kraków (hereafter APK).

recruiting more blue-collar workers and peasant women into leadership ranks.⁹⁹ At the first national congress in 1951, over 90 percent of the delegates were either peasants or blue-collar workers, many of whom worked in “new occupations,” previously reserved for men.¹⁰⁰ In 1986, in contrast, League membership throughout Poland was composed of roughly equal numbers of blue-collar and white-collar members.¹⁰¹ The increase in white-collar workers is indicative of the growing numbers of women who had greater education and work opportunities under socialism. Many women who came from working-class and peasant families would probably have been blue-collar workers or farmers one or two generations earlier. This increase also reflects an economic shift away from heavy industry to the service sector. Employed women (and prior to 1966 farming women) were the most common type of member. Housewives, even though the League consistently tried to encourage them to join, accounted for a small percentage of membership.

Age is the most difficult factor to determine, because League officials seldom provided information about age. In the Łódź province in 1949, 60 percent of members were between eighteen and thirty-five and 40 percent were over thirty-five.¹⁰² In 1974, provincial administrations broken down by age included 57 (7 percent) members under thirty, 437 (44 percent) between the ages of thirty-one and forty-five, 326 (42 percent) between forty-six and sixty years of age, and 57 (7 percent) over sixty.¹⁰³ Most of the

⁹⁹ “Uchwała Egzekutywy KW z dnia 29 grudnia 1949 r. w sprawie pracy wśród kobiet,” 29 December 1949, File “Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR w Krakowie Egzekutywa, 27 XII 1948—31 XII 1949,” sygn. PZPR KW Kr 188, APK.

¹⁰⁰ Out of 946 delegates, 571 (60 percent) were blue-collar workers, 298 (32 percent) were peasants, 74 (8 percent) were white-collar workers, and 3 (about .3 percent) were professionals. “I Ogólnopolski Kongres Ligi Kobiet,” Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, 3.

¹⁰¹ 45.5 percent blue-collar workers, 42.3 percent white-collar workers, 1.7 percent farmers, and 10.5 percent from other groups (probably mostly housewives) made up the League membership. “Liga Kobiet Polskich w liczbach,” 31. The significantly lower percentage of women from rural areas is a direct result of the 1966 transformation. The party’s social composition also changed from 60 percent manual labors in 1949 to 40.2 percent in 1968 and 17.3 percent white-collar workers in 1949 to 43 percent in 1968. V. C. Chrypinski, “Poland,” in *The Communist States in Disarray, 1965-1971*, ed. Adam Bromke and Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 95-120, esp. 110.

¹⁰² “Sprawozdanie: Wydziału Kobiecego KW PZPR w Łodzi za miesiąc styczeń 1949 r.”

¹⁰³ Wydział Organizacyjny ZGLK, “Informacja o przebiegu wojewódzkich zjazdów Ligi Kobiet,” 13-14.

delegates chosen for the Częstochowa provincial congress in 1978 were in their forties and fifties.¹⁰⁴ In 1986, of all League members, 20 percent were younger than thirty, 62 percent were between the ages of thirty-one and fifty-five, and 18 percent were over the age fifty-five.¹⁰⁵ From these scant documents we can tentatively conclude that members were generally middle-aged, neither young nor old. Most members, then, belonged to the organization once they already had children, and many of them were in the midst of their careers.

The above membership classifications are by no means complete. Documents are inconsistent in the presentation of membership make-up: sometimes they included all of these categories; in other instances, they provided only some; and still others divided categories up in different ways. Although a complete and definitive picture of typical members is not altogether possible, these sources at the very least provide some ideas as to who they were. A typical member was either a member of the Communist Party (other parties were represented in much lower numbers) or was not affiliated with any party. Most commonly middle-aged, she worked outside the home (or was a farmer until 1966) and had a mid-level education. In upper-level positions, she was more likely to have a higher education, be a Communist Party member, and work in a white-collar job.

Recruitment and Personal Meanings of League Activism

Women were recruited into the League through a variety of means, but the most popular form of recruitment was word of mouth and personal contacts. Members often encouraged friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, and relatives to join. In the Organization of Army Families, for example, when an officer married and brought his new wife into the military environment, members visited her with flowers and baked goods as a gesture of invitation into and an introduction to the organization as well as the community.¹⁰⁶ Members of an army chapter in Wrocław, for example, invited Wiesława Smolarczyk, a

¹⁰⁴ “Wykaz delegatek na I Wojewódzki Zjazd Ligi Kobiet z terenu woj. Częstochowskiego,” [1978], File “I zjazd wojewódzki Ligi Kobiet Polskich w Częstochowie,” sygn. 1, APC.

¹⁰⁵ “Liga Kobiet Polskich w liczbach,” 31.

¹⁰⁶ Helena P., interview.

young woman, to attend a meeting. “At my husband’s persuasion, I went.” Following the gathering, two women asked her to join, and she did.¹⁰⁷ In 1947, a few members asked Teresa Kucharska to sign up after they helped with furnishing the preschool where she worked.¹⁰⁸ “What are you going to do at home?” Danuta B. asked friends in her neighborhood and urged them to participate in League activities rather than sit at home wasting time.¹⁰⁹ Ilona Sobik, a twenty-three-year-old president of a League city administration, entered the organization in 1981, when her friends encouraged her to join. “I was a bit surprised,” she stated, “until then I never had contact with the organization. Now, I must admit, that the arguments they convinced me with could not be refuted.”¹¹⁰ Within just a few months, she became one of the chapter’s leaders.

Particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the League used other recruiting tactics. Members held formal meetings and rallies, plastered posters in towns and cities announcing such events, and held meetings in places of employment, sometimes in the face of disapproval from factory managers.¹¹¹ According to a Women’s Division report, in the cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot in 1949, mass meetings attracted some three thousand women, mostly housewives, to discuss pay reforms, as well as family allowances, maternity leave, social insurance, lack of meat and fats, alcohol abuse, and preschool

¹⁰⁷ Wiesława Smolarczyk, “Więcej niż nakazuje obowiązek,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1986): 50-51, quotation on 50. In 1984, the League, along with the women’s magazine *Zwierciadło* (Mirror) and the *Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Pamiętnikarstwa* (Friends of Memoirs Society), organized a contest “*Kartka z pamiętnika*” (“A chapter from a diary”) in celebration of the fortieth year of Poland’s People’s Republic and the League. Members were asked to send in autobiographical accounts of their experiences (or even a specific incidence) in the League and more generally under communist Poland. Some of these accounts, including Smolarczyk’s, were later published in *Nasza praca*. They shed some light on the personal meaning of League activism.

¹⁰⁸ Teresa Kucharska, “Zmierzchu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1985): 26-33, esp. 27. Kucharska was a winner of one of the top four prizes in the “Chapter from a diary” contest.

¹⁰⁹ Danuta B., interview. Marysia P. also stated that members brought other women into the League in this manner. Marysia P., interview.

¹¹⁰ Zofia Drałus and Ilona Sobik, interview by Barbara Kostka, “Przeszłość za nami—przyszłość przed nami,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1985): 12-15, quotation on 13.

¹¹¹ Danuta Walocha, “Sprawozdanie z działalności Woj. Wydziału Kobiet za miesiąc sierpień 1948 r.,” 6 September 1948r, File “Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948,” PPR Kr 341, APK; and “Sprawozdanie,” 30 January 1946, in *ibid.* See various posters, File “Liga Kobiet, 1945-1950,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN; and posters, File “Kobiety w Polsce Ludowej, 1953,” sygn. I 1d, DZS, BN.

facilities. Following such gatherings, the report maintained, the League gained many new housewife members, who probably joined because of the topics that the group addressed, issues important to women and their families.¹¹² School children were urged to encourage their mothers to join.¹¹³ Members sometimes walked door to door handing out invitations for meetings to nonworking women often without telling them that the event was for the League.¹¹⁴ Chapters also participated in contests, and one of the areas of competition was recruitment of new members. Similar to other state-sponsored competitions throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in which productivity was central, League contests centered on increasing productivity by expanding programs, introducing new forms of activism, and recruiting members.¹¹⁵ Winning as best chapter was incentive to bring more women into the League.

Especially in the first decade, certain women were expected to become members because of their husbands' positions in the party-state. In March 1947, for example, a Kraków province Women's Division document claimed that all wives of Communist Party members must become League members.¹¹⁶ Another document from the same Division dated five months later suggests that this regulation had yet to be successfully enforced. "Among [Communist Party] members we sense an unwillingness. The secretary of

¹¹² "Sprawozdanie z akcji 8 marca wg. pytań zawartych w ankiecie z dn. 12/IV do 18/V/1949," File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety – KW Gdańsk," sygn. 237/XV-11, AAN.

¹¹³ Irena Duniak, "Sprawozdanie: Z akcji 8-go marca na terenie województwa łódzkiego," [1951], File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety – KW Łódź," sygn. 237/XV-18, AAN.

¹¹⁴ "Dzielnica Górna Lewa Ligi Kobiet, Łódź, 10.V.1952," 10 May 1952, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety – KW Łódź," sygn. 237/XV-17, AAN; "Informacja: O przebiegu kampanii sprawozdawczo-wyborczej Ligi Kobiet w Nowej Hucie w okresie letnim 1954 r.," 6 August 1954, File "Kom.Dz.PZPR-Nowa Huta," sygn. 60/IV-11, APK; and M. Winiarzowa, "Analiza pracy kół blokowych," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1953): 14-21, esp. 18.

¹¹⁵ Each chapter competed against one other chapter. The winner was determined quantitatively in such areas as numbers of lectures and courses organized, attendees at specific gatherings, visits to rural areas, new recruits, and agitators trained. State-sponsored competitions were popular throughout the region. The most common competition type was geared toward work production and industrialization. Through workers' participation, labor competitions enabled party-states to increase industrial output, and winners (*stakhanovites* or work leaders) received benefits for their efforts. On labor competition in Poland, see for example, Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, chap. 5. For the Soviet Union, see Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), chap. 7.

¹¹⁶ Danuta Walocha, "Ocena pracy Wydziału Kobięcego przez egzekutywe," 11 March [1947], File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1946-1948," PPR Kr 341, APK.

the city administration has not yet signed up either his wife or his adult daughter not only to the party but also to the League. An appeal . . . to the secretary has had no results.”¹¹⁷ As this case demonstrates, husbands and fathers sometimes directly were urged to force their wives and daughters to become involved. The document continues by stating that “this same story” is seen with “some secretaries of parish [community] administrations, who have not signed up either their wives or other family members to any organization.”¹¹⁸ In 1956, a wife of a prominent party leader was not a League member because, according to her husband, he was working socially enough for both of them, and she was too busy preparing his meals, taking care of their children, and shining his shoes.¹¹⁹ In this instance, the husband clearly did not want his wife to take on a new role outside of the home, but it is unclear whether or not his wife desired to become a member. He did not want his wife to meddle in politics because as a woman her responsibility was to take care of his needs. At times, husbands were successful in encouraging their wives to join. Irena H., for example, married a militia officer in 1968, who then immediately signed her up in the League. Having always been interested in activism and politics, she was thrilled about her participation and became (and continues to be) an active member.¹²⁰

Dues-paying yet largely inactive members were a problem with which the League had to contend.¹²¹ “Many members hold a membership card and pay membership fees, but they do not work in

¹¹⁷ Anna Szydłowska, “Odpis protokołu z Brzeska, z dn. 25.VI.47, Referat Kobiety, do Referatu Kobiecego przy Wojewódzkim Komitecie w Krakowie,” 7 August 1947, File “Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948,” sygn. PPR 343, APK.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ “Na tropie spraw zaniedbanych: W czterech ścianach domu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 9-12, quotation on 12.

¹²⁰ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

¹²¹ Irena H. commented on the inactivity of members. Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000. Today, a number of members have claimed that the decrease in membership in the postcommunist period was actually beneficial since most of the women who opted to leave the organization were less active than those who stayed. Jaruga-Nowacka, interview; and Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000. The Union of Polish Youth experienced similar problems of inactivity. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 69-84.

any chapter,” stated one leader.¹²² According to Musiałowa, although the organization had over two million members in the 1950s, that number did not correlate to active members. Furthermore, numerous local chapters in apartment buildings organized no activities.¹²³ In some locations, few women attended meetings. During the stalinist period, one report complained, only about 25 percent (ten out of forty) showed up to meetings regularly in a chapter in the city of Żyrardów.¹²⁴ In a factory in Łódź at around the same time, the League called off three meetings due to low turnouts. The report also complained that in one chapter, although the meeting was organized well, the discussion moved in the wrong direction. Rather than discuss the agenda, women “talked about their own complaints, that they could not buy . . . many things of greatest need.”¹²⁵ Women who attended League events did so for their own reasons, in this case to complain and discuss hardships they faced, rather than for official League business. One article from 1955 claimed that many workers’ wives and mothers refused to join. “When we organize meetings, they cry: ‘give us nurseries and preschools, then we will eagerly go to work and to League of Women meetings.’”¹²⁶ These women wanted to see real benefits from joining, such as childcare. A complaining member noted that “one resident, an engineer . . . , when I came to her with her membership card, she put down 10 złoty. And she said: ‘I prefer to pay more right away so that I can only be left alone by the League of Women.’” Taken aback and angered by this action, the member who came to the engineer “took the membership card and said that we do not make deals for memberships to the organization.”¹²⁷ The engineer’s actions suggest that some women paid dues even though they wanted to have little to do with the organization. The complaining member’s response demonstrates that active members did not necessarily want inactive and somewhat hostile participants. Janina S. was also inactive in the mid-1950s because she disliked what her

¹²² Stanisława Zawadecka, “Plenum ZGLK,” *Nasza praca*, no. 21-32 (31 December 1957): 10-17, quotation on 14-15.

¹²³ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” 16.

¹²⁴ “Analiza pracy kobiet w Żyrardowie,” [1951], File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-25, AAN.

¹²⁵ “Sprawozdanie,” n.d., File “KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety – KW Łódź,” sygn. 237/XV-17, AAN.

¹²⁶ “Nie zapominajmy o PGR-ach,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1955): 20.

¹²⁷ “O ‘zapomnianych’ blokach i trudnościach niektórych kół blokowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (April 1956): 26-27, quotation on 26. Złoty is the monetary unit in Poland.

chapter was focusing on—on “women’s “hen” instincts,”” like cleaning entryways to apartments, maintaining a clean apartment building and public spaces, etc.¹²⁸ When Ilona Sobik started to attend meetings in the 1980s, she was shocked at the level of inactivity. “Doubts seized me,” she said. “I noticed their apathy, disenchantment, weakness, [and] lack of desire to work.”¹²⁹ Inactivity within the League is not necessarily indicative of disillusionment or failure specific to the communist context, but rather tendencies within organizations more generally. Inactive members are common to many organizations worldwide, especially when some people are pressured to join. These examples demonstrate that individual members decided their level of activism. They also may have joined to appease someone but showed opposition to the system by their inactivity.¹³⁰

Why did the women who did join the League decide to become members? Throughout the entire period, some women became members to obtain something—services or goods. In 1947, for example, a Women’s Division representative in a small town wrote to local party leaders that “League of Women members are mostly nothing but the poor, some have [become members] to get something” for free.¹³¹ A member from a residential chapter maintained that in her apartment building “you could only draw women in with some benefits,” such as sewing and knitting courses.¹³² Sobik claimed that “the majority wants to reap as many benefits as possible and with the least amount of energy.”¹³³ Irena H. stated that a few women signed up when they came to receive legal advice from attorneys working in the League’s social-legal

¹²⁸ “Na tropie spraw zaniedbanych,” 12.

¹²⁹ Drafus and Sobik, interview by Kostka, “Przeszłość za nami—przyszłość przed nami,” 13.

¹³⁰ Kochanowicz, for example, has argued that inactivity in the Union of Polish Youth was a sign of opposition to the communist system. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, esp. chaps. 5-6.

¹³¹ Teresa Roszkowicz to Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, 26 June 1947, File “Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948,” sygn. PPR Kr 345, APK.

¹³² “O ‘zapomnianych’ blokach i trudnościach,” 27. See also “Koło blokowe—to podstawa pracy Ligi Kobiet w mieście,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1956): 10-11.

¹³³ Drafus and Sobik, interview by Kostka, “Przeszłość za nami—przyszłość przed nami,” 14.

clinics, erroneously believing that they would get better service if they were members.¹³⁴ Other women hoped that through membership they would attain a better life.¹³⁵ Women in the League, and especially party women in the League, had greater and easier access to certain party officials and institutions, indeed making their lives, in some cases, easier.¹³⁶ As Danuta B. stated, “If you were in the League of Women then you were able to go to the [party] administration; in the administration” they would talk to you “because you signed up in the League of Women.”¹³⁷ These motivations are similar to reasons why some Poles joined the Communist Party as well as other organizations. Party membership, like League membership, was seen as an avenue to a better life, services, goods, and career. Some Poles who joined the party were attracted by the promise of social mobility or workplace advancement. They saw real benefits from the system and from their party membership.¹³⁸

Working and nonworking women had different reasons for joining and not joining the League. Working women who joined workplace chapters did so for two reasons, according to Bożena N.: to strive for improving workplace conditions (such as protective legislation, positions for pregnant women, and night work) and to benefit from League courses and demonstrations.¹³⁹ Furthermore, they may have joined

¹³⁴ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000. Currently, as a result, when a woman wants to become a member, Irena always asks in what types of activities and programs she intends to participate to gauge whether or not this woman seriously wants to join.

¹³⁵ ZW LK Łódź, *25 lat Ligi Kobiet: 25 lat działalności Ligi Kobiet województwa łódzkiego, 1945-1970* (Łódź: ZWLK, 1970), 12, File “Liga Kobiet, 1968,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN.

¹³⁶ Danuta B., interview; Marysia P., interview; and Łęcznarowiczowa, interview.

¹³⁷ Danuta B., interview.

¹³⁸ Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, 171-72. Joanna Wawrzyniak has speculated that this was the case for some members of the Union of Combatants for Freedom and Democracy as well. Some may have joined to receive benefits. Joanna Wawrzyniak, “Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację: Ewolucja ideologii a więź grupowa,” in *PRL: Trwanie i zmiana*, ed. Dariusz Stola and Marcin Zaremba (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania im. Leona Koźmińskiego, 2003), 351-72, esp. 372. Kochanowicz has stated that youth also joined the Union of Polish Youth to obtain something – access to universities, higher salaries, advancement, and material benefits. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 69, 136.

¹³⁹ Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000. In her study of 140 presidents of local chapters, Ratman-Liwerska found that 26 percent of the respondents indicated that learning something valuable was one of the greatest motivational factors in joining. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 246-47.

because treatment on the shopfloor might have been better if one was a League member. Throughout its history, though, the League experienced difficulty in organizing women in residential areas, and League and party leaders reiterated concern over incorporating housewives into the organization. Housewives did not join for a variety of reasons. They were dispersed, and therefore League organizers had greater difficulty in bringing them together. Women in workplaces worked under one roof, creating fewer obstacles to organizational efforts. In the same vein, authorities had less control over housewives, since managers and party officials did not oversee what they did on a daily basis. Consequently, they most likely did not feel as if they had to or should join to appease authoritative figures in the workplace. In other words, they did not see the benefits of joining the organization or the possible repercussions for not joining as working women may have felt.

For some women, joining the League was a continuation of their activism in youth organizations, Circles of Rural Housewives, or political parties.¹⁴⁰ Young women often moved from their participation in youth organizations into the League and sometimes even combined both for a few years.¹⁴¹ After leaving the countryside where they were active in the Circles of Rural Housewives, some redirected their activism to the urban women's group. Zofia K., for instance, began her activism as a young woman in 1947 in the rural organization, where she organized a preschool and assisted women in cultivating produce for sale. She moved to a city in 1951, after which she immediately became a League member.¹⁴² Some women followed in the footsteps of parents. For example, although her husband signed her up in the organization, Irena H. had already been interested in political and activist issues through her mother, a member of the Circles of Rural Housewives.¹⁴³ Finally, some women were (or had been) members of various communist political

¹⁴⁰ Ratman-Liwerska has found that members were more likely to be active in other organizations or political parties than women who were not members. *Ibid.*, 277.

¹⁴¹ "Dziś tu jutro tam," *Kobieta w dniu ich święta*, *jednodniówka* (ZW LK Zielona Góra, 8 March 1960): 3; "Praca zawodowa i społeczna—nierozzerwalna całość," in *ibid.*, 3; "Barbara Szymak," *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (1985): 20-21; "W czterdziestolecie powrotu Ziemi Zachodnich do macierzy," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1985): 14-24, esp. 21; Kucharska, "Zmierzchu"; "Irena Czajko," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1986): 13-14; Leokadia Ś., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000; and Urszula P., interview.

¹⁴² Zofia K., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

¹⁴³ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

parties—the Polish United Workers’ Party, or earlier in the Polish Workers’ Party, and the interwar *Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polski* (Communist Union of Polish Youth) and Communist Party of Poland—and already had developed strong interests in activism prior to joining the League.¹⁴⁴

Participation had different meanings for different women. As Joanna Wawrzyniak has stated, scholars should move beyond seeing state initiated organizations as functioning solely for the state. At least some of the members of Poland’s Union of Combatants for Freedom and Democracy, for example, like the League, were active in the organization for “their own goals and aspirations.”¹⁴⁵ Numerous members stated that they entered the League largely due to a desire to engage in social activism and help others, in other words to engage in altruistic or charitable work.¹⁴⁶ Zofia Drafus, a co-founder of a chapter and longtime member, for instance, joined because of “a desire to work socially.”¹⁴⁷ Danuta B. maintained that she liked to help people from an early age. She enjoyed “social work. . . . I liked to talk about women.”¹⁴⁸ For Irena Czajko, social work always “pulled me in, work for people—this was after all great satisfaction, when you could help, if you could save someone, if only there would be one less tear.”¹⁴⁹ When she moved to Kraków, Wanda K. wanted to belong to an organization that helped people and decided to sign up in the League,¹⁵⁰ while Helena C. wanted to do something of value after finishing college in Kraków and moving

¹⁴⁴ For some examples, see “Aniela Czech,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1985): 10-11; “W czterdziestolecie powrotu Ziem Zachodnich do macierzy,” 15; and Janina Leokadia Żmudzińska, “Wspomnienia działaczki PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1986): 52-56, esp. 53 (one of the winners of the “Chapter of a diary” contest). Urszula P. and Irena H. likewise were first communist party members.

¹⁴⁵ Wawrzyniak, “Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację,” 372. For a discussion of why women in general entered social activist work, see, for example, Elżbieta Adamczuk, “Dlaczego działają społecznie?” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1977): 29-31.

¹⁴⁶ In her study of 140 presidents of local chapters, Ratman-Liwerska found that 82 percent of the respondents indicated that this was one of their greatest motivational factors in League membership. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 246-47.

¹⁴⁷ Drafus and Sobik, interview by Kostka, “Przeszłość za nami—przyszłość przed nami,” 13.

¹⁴⁸ Danuta B., interview.

¹⁴⁹ “Irena Czajko.”

¹⁵⁰ Wanda K., interview.

to the Opole area in the late 1960s.¹⁵¹ For long-time member Waclawa Rębacz, “social work became my second nature. I cannot live without it.”¹⁵² Jadwiga Milewska was “so strongly linked to the League of Women, its problems, that she cannot imagine life without social work.”¹⁵³ As the only women’s organization in the urban setting, the League became an avenue for women eager to participate in helping others in some capacity.

Members exhibited varied levels of interest in the political component of the organization and party politics. Some women were interested in how the League fit into politics and were staunch supporters of the communist system, while others were more concerned about day-to-day activities that helped women. A number of women stated repeatedly that the League was not a political organization, while others recognized its political character. Not all members viewed the politicization of women as a central goal or the League’s ties to politics as important to their personal activism. What was often presented as most important on the national level in statutes and resolutions as well as conferences did not necessarily reflect individual members’ perceptions.

In the immediate postwar period, Sztachelska claimed that the League was nonparty but political, meaning that the group was not a Communist Party organization but was involved in political issues.¹⁵⁴ Yet in the stalinist period, some party officials criticized the League’s apolitical character, demonstrating their concern that members strayed too far from politics. One official from the Kraków province, for example, stressed the need for members to remember that “the organization is not apolitical. . . . In their work on organizing courses by experts and economists, League members often forget that this work is not the ultimate goal of the League.”¹⁵⁵ His statement indicates that some members focused on issues other than politics in their activism. In contrast, in 1947, some members in the Kraków region criticized the League

¹⁵¹ Helena C., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

¹⁵² “Waclawa Rębacz,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1985): 15-16, quotation on 16.

¹⁵³ Marianna Borawska, “Związana z ruchem kobiecym od wczesnej młodości . . .,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1984): 36-37, quotation on 37.

¹⁵⁴ Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet*, 18.

¹⁵⁵ Rybicki, “Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW.”

for engaging in political work when members gathered signatures for petitions to strengthen Poland's bonds with Spain. The League received letters from members that stated: "instead of taking care of unemployed women in Poland, the League sends money to Spain." Two members of a city administration refused to sign the petition; they believed the League was unnecessarily meddling in politics.¹⁵⁶ For some party officials, then, the League was not political enough, while for some members it was too political.

Helena P. claimed that no one asked whether a member was a party member: "there absolutely was no political consciousness," she maintained.¹⁵⁷ According to Bożena N., the League "did not concentrate on issues related to high politics" but rather on women's everyday needs.¹⁵⁸ Kazimiera C. made similar claims. "A woman is a woman. We organize as women," not as party members. Meetings, she claimed, were "strictly women's meetings," and the League did not care about a member's worldview or political background. International meetings, she claimed, "were lively. . . . And there was no political face. I will stress this one more time. There was no political face." Kazimiera maintained that the League focused on "world peace, helping families and children" and did not hide another agenda of politicizing women. "The first words I said with certainty when I met with [women] in workplaces was that we do not come here to account for or pull in some kind of political system."¹⁵⁹ Marysia P. did not deny that the League was tied to the party, but she stated that it was not a party organization. She and Danuta B. insisted that at least in smaller cities, the League did not offer lectures and readings on ideological issues. Even in official meetings, Danuta claimed, party and League leaders did not "force" party politics.¹⁶⁰ League president during the transition into the postcommunist period Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa maintained that

¹⁵⁶ B[ronisława] Legomska, "Sprawozdanie Wojewódzkiego Wydziału Kobiecego za okres od 1 do 30 września 47 r.," 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," PPR Kr 341, APK.

¹⁵⁷ Helena P., interview. Wanda K., interview; Barbara K., interview; and Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000, also made these claims.

¹⁵⁸ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000. Bogusława J., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000 reiterated Bożena's statement. See also, for example, "Sprawozdanie z ostatniego zebrania Sułkowic," 2 December 1945, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 344, APK.

¹⁵⁹ Kazimiera C., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000.

¹⁶⁰ Marysia P., interview; and Danuta B., interview.

politicization was not felt, especially in smaller cities and towns where the League's charitable work was most important.¹⁶¹ According to Barbara K., sometime in the 1960s, a party secretary in the region devised a plan to have party bodies within all organizations. "We listened," said Barbara, and "I asked what is this body supposed to do. If our organization has in its registry that it is an apolitical organization. . . who is supposed to create this body. . . . I don't understand this, since we have this in our statute."¹⁶² The party secretary dropped the plan. Current League president Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka has maintained that besides the few women in top level positions, members "were not interested in politics at all and would definitely not have come to the organization exclusively for . . . propagandistic agitation. . . . Women are too rational and have too many responsibilities to want to come to this type of gathering."¹⁶³ Although some of these women were party members, they viewed politics as peripheral to League activism.

In contrast, Irena H. joined the League partly because she saw it as a political organization. "I love politics. . . . For sixteen years I was a political worker for the party and this work in politics fulfilled me very much." One of the first lectures that she attended as a League member was "A political family, an atypical family," a lecture from which she claimed she learned a lot of valuable information. As a member, she organized various courses on politics, through which, she claimed, the organization "raised women's consciousness."¹⁶⁴ Irena saw politics as central to League initiatives and understood the organization as playing a role in educating women politically. Her sentiments resembled official League goals.

Not all League leaders were involved in party politics, but for some the League became (either directly or indirectly) a stepping stone into higher positions within the party-state.¹⁶⁵ As Maria Gacek, in an essay contest in Nowa Huta, stated: "many social activists [and] workers in the state administration came

¹⁶¹ Lęcznarowiczowa, interview.

¹⁶² Barbara K., interview.

¹⁶³ Jaruga-Nowacka, interview.

¹⁶⁴ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

¹⁶⁵ Kochanowicz has stated that this was one of the reasons why some youth joined the Union of Polish Youth. The organization was a "trampoline for further advancement within the system." Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 46.

from our [the League's] membership."¹⁶⁶ Numerous members combined women's activism with party activism, while some left the League to become fully engaged in party work. Many members held local and regional party positions, and a few entered national politics as, for example, members of the party's Central Committee, directors or ministers of various political bodies, or even representatives to Poland's Parliament. Eighteen delegates to the League's 1966 national conference were deputies to Parliament and 197 were members of People's Councils on various levels.¹⁶⁷ After the 1974 elections to the League provincial administrations, two presidents were also members of Parliament and seven were members of the provincial *Rady Narodowe* (People's Councils).¹⁶⁸ In 1984, out of 175 women who were chosen to city and provincial councils in the city of Słupsk, 55 were League members.¹⁶⁹ In 1986, of 93 female deputies in Parliament, 46 were League members.¹⁷⁰ Party leaders used the upper levels of the League as a source of recruitment into party leadership.¹⁷¹

Urszula P. had been a member of the party's Central Committee as well as the party's committee in Łódź.¹⁷² In 1984, economist Anna Kędzierska, the director of the League's Home Economics Committee since 1973, was named the Minister of Domestic Trade and Service (*Handel Wewnętrzny i Usług*).¹⁷³ Sztachelska, first SOLK president and deputy to Parliament, stepped down from her League position in

¹⁶⁶ Maria Gacek, essay for contest "Konkurs 'Wspomnienia Nowej Hucie,'" 1979, in personal possession of Barbara K.

¹⁶⁷ "Wstęp," in *Nowy etap działalności Ligi Kobiet*, 5

¹⁶⁸ Wydział Organizacyjny ZGLK, "Informacja o przebiegu wojewódzkich zjazdów Ligi Kobiet," 13-14.

¹⁶⁹ Barbara Kostka, "Być radną," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1984): 4-7.

¹⁷⁰ "Liga Kobiet Polskich w liczbach," 33.

¹⁷¹ Sociologist Éva Fodor has stated that although the National Council of Hungarian Women was open to all women, one of its tasks was also "to prepare a select few for membership in the organizations of the communist party." The Council president was a Central Committee ex officio member. Éva Fodor, "Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (April 2002): 240-63, quotation on 249. See also Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 140.

¹⁷² Urszula P., interview.

¹⁷³ "Anna Kędzierska—Ministrem Handlu Wewnętrznego i Usług," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1984): 32.

1950 to become the director of the Institute of Mothers and Children, a position that suited her pediatrics specialty.¹⁷⁴ Musiałowa, League president from 1950 until 1965, served as member of Parliament between 1952 and 1969 and held other national party positions as well. Prior to becoming League president, she also was the vice-director of the Communist Party's Women's Division.¹⁷⁵ Serving the League as president from 1975 until 1982, Eugenia Kemparowa, an attorney, was an alternate member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a member of the National Council (*Rada Państwa*) in the 1970s, and member of Parliament.¹⁷⁶ These are just a few of the many examples of League members who participated in party-state institutions and bodies. For these women, the League was their primary source of social and political activism geared specifically to women but not their only form of political activism. For some, the League provided necessary experience in the political realm that they then used in other positions within the party-state.

For some members, undoubtedly the League was not a political organization, while for others it was directly entwined with politics and the party. What is at play here is not necessarily a denial of the League's intricate relationship to politics and the party, but rather individual sentiments about the personal meaning of the organization as well as a difference between the official national stance and the perceptions of individual women. Women who joined came from various backgrounds and joined for a variety of reasons. In addition, local chapters were significantly less interested in official rhetoric than in everyday women's issues, whereas the national League body did and was expected to engage in political discourse. Hence, in upper-level administrations the organization had a lot more to do with politics than in local small chapters. This complex relationship to politics demonstrates that depicting the League as solely political overlooks the meaning that individual women gave to the organization. Looking beyond official rhetoric, a diverse spectrum of political and personal meaning emerges.

¹⁷⁴ "Kalendarium Ligi Kobiet Polskich," 18; and Bystrzycka, "Trzeba znaleźć swoje miejsce."

¹⁷⁵ Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy*, 400. Edwarda Orłowska, the director of the Women's Division, chose Musiałowa to become League president. Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet," 27.

¹⁷⁶ Proceedings from the Fifth National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 10-11 (1971); and Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Conference.

Conclusion

The League was not a monolithic and centralized organization with a homogenous membership that was intricately tied to the Communist Party, even though from its origins it was connected to the political environment. In fact, the League was a complex and changing organization with various goals and diverse members who expressed different meanings and levels of their activism. Although the group was not directly linked to an interwar League of Women, as some current members have claimed, it had some roots in interwar women's activism. Thus it was not merely an anomaly of the communist era. The organization was not controlled absolutely by central League and party authorities. It manifested elements of both central control and localism, receiving directives from above and initiating programs from below, working both for the state and for women. Furthermore, the League was attractive to women from various political, educational, and occupational backgrounds. Members expressed diverse reasons for joining the organization and attributed different meanings to their own activism. An examination of the League's formation, structure, and membership demonstrates its elasticity and complexity, characteristics that emerge on various levels of the League's history, as shown in the chapters to follow.

CHAPTER 2

CREATING POLITICALLY ENLIGHTENED SOCIALIST WOMEN IN THE POSTWAR AND STALINIST PERIODS

The League of Women . . . must take on a very serious educational (*wychowawczo-oświatowej*) burden of work. . . Its educational activism must reach every woman in the League and must influence all women not yet organized. . . We must deepen our organizational work and mobilize a broad group of active women for it, educating and shaping them into conscious social activists. Every day we must raise the level of women's social consciousness and join the grand assignment of social rebuilding of the People's Country into a Socialist Poland.¹

The League's main statutory form of activism is educational, enlightening work, . . . which has as its goal increasing women's consciousness to a higher incomparable level and mobilizing them to the best realization of Six-Year Plan assignments.²

In these statements, two League leaders conveyed the League's prominent goal of creating socialist women by educating and enlightening them about socialism. In November 1948 at a national conference, Izolda Kowalska-Kiryłuk, a founding member of SOLK and the Central Administration's

¹ I[zolda] Kowalska-Kiryłuk, "Rola i zadania Ligi Kobiet na tle sytuacji w kraju: Referat Sekretarza Generalnego Ligi Kobiet I. Kowalskiej-Kiryłuk wygłoszony na konfer. krajowej Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (December 1948): 23-42, quotations on 33, 42. The term *wychować*, of which *wychowawczo* is a derivative, has multiple meanings, including to educate, to raise, and to bring up. The League attempted to do all three for women. The term *oświata*, of which *oświatowej* is a derivative, generally means education. Ideological education was also a goal for the Union of Polish Youth. Joanna Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie: Stalinowska próba modernizacji opornej rzeczywistości* (Warsaw: Trio, 2000), 36.

² Zofia Wasilkowska, "Podstawowe założenia statutu Ligi Kobiet," Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, *Nasza praca*, no. 6-7 (March-April 1951): 63-69, quotation on 66. The Six-Year Plan commenced in 1950. Like other economic plans in Soviet bloc countries, it delineated goals in various economic sectors. Born in 1910, Wasilkowska, a judge of the Highest Court, was a member of the Socialist Party before becoming a Communist Party member in 1948. She served on the Central Committee of the party from 1954 until 1959, was a member of Parliament from 1952 until 1961, and a vice-director of the Women's Division from 1949 until 1953. In 1981, she left the party and participated in the opposition. Tadeusz Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy, 1944-1991: Władze państwowe i polityczne Polski według stanu na dzień 28 II 1991* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAN, 1991), 437.

general secretary, presented the centrality of educating all women, particularly about politics. The League, she claimed, was supposed to take on this “work among women” in workplaces, rural areas, and places of residence. A League vice-president, Zofia Wasilkowska, reiterated Kowalska-Kirylyuk’s sentiment three years later at the organization’s national congress. Through League efforts, women’s consciousness was to be raised to a higher and acceptable level and women were to be mobilized to engage in industrialization campaigns.

During the communist period (and especially under stalinism), party-states throughout Eastern Europe placed significant emphasis on spreading policies, programs, and ideology among the populace through such means as radio, film, publications, periodicals, posters, and individual and mass agitation.³ Mass organizations, including women’s and youth groups, also participated in mobilizing society for economic and political purposes. They acted as “transmission belts” between the party and various sectors of the population.⁴ In their efforts to popularize socialist ideology and recruit constituents to the party, party leaders recognized the importance of including women. Women served as propaganda facilitators as well as recipients, and women’s organizations became one of the avenues

³ On propaganda in Poland, see Marcin Zaremba, “Komunizm jako system mobilizacyjny: Casus Polski,” in *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2001), 110-26; Dariusz Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948-1956 a chłopci* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1998), esp. chap. 3; Michał Głowiński, *Peereliada: Komentarze do słów, 1976-1981* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1993); Jakub Karpiński, *Mowa do ludu: Szkice o języku polityki* (London: Puls, 1984); Stanisław Kuśmierski and Aleksander Frydrychowicz, *Podstawy wiedzy o propagandzie* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1980); Stanisław Kuśmierski, *Teoretyczne problemy propagandy i opinii publicznej* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980); Stanisław Kuśmierski, *Świadomość społeczna, opinia publiczna, propaganda* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Państwowe Naukowe, 1987); Piotr Wierzbicki, *Struktura kłamstwa* (London: Aneks, 1987); and Jerzy Bralczyk, *O języku polskiej propagandy politycznej lat siedemdziesiątych* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, Printed with support from the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1987).

⁴ “Transmission belt” is a term that Lenin coined. Numerous scholars have conducted research on Polish youth organizations under communism and have shown their role in transmitting official information. See, for example, Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*; Zbigniew Jerzy Hirs, ed., *Zjednoczenie polskiego ruchu młodzieżowego i powstanie ZMP* (Białystok: Rada Wojewódzka Sd RP and Zarząd Wojewódzki ZSMP, 1990); Bogdan Hillebrandt, “Stołeczna organizacja ZMP,” in *Postępowe organizacje młodzieżowe w Warszawie, 1864-1956*, ed. Bogdan Hillebrandt (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 221-49, and Bogdan Hillebrandt, *Polskie organizacje młodzieżowe, XIX i XX wieku: Zarys historii* (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1986). Peter Kenez also has noted that the Soviet youth organization, the Komsomol, acted as a “transmission belt.” See Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chaps. 4 and 8. See also Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000).

used in this endeavor. Members of these groups were critical in attempting to reach women and recast them into enlightened citizens and productive workers.

During the revolutionary period in Russia, for example, women in the *Zhenotdel* sought to mobilize women politically. As historian Elizabeth A. Wood has noted, “the party trained women activists to conduct ‘work among women,’ i.e., outreach work to involve other women.”⁵ Members of the Yugoslav Anti-Fascist Front of Women likewise attempted to mobilize women to communism,⁶ and the Union of Albanian women “functioned as one of the party’s most effective propagandistic wings.”⁷ Under Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, the National Women’s Council promoted official pronatalist policy.⁸ The Union of Czechoslovak Women “was to increase women’s political awareness and organize women’s equal participation in the development of the state.”⁹ Like the League in Poland, these women’s organizations were instrumental in spreading official party views among their members and, more important, among women at large. Although scholars have treated women’s communist-era organizations largely as arms of party-states, we know very little about how these groups functioned in the propaganda effort. Numerous scholars have provided assessments of how the state spread its

⁵ Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 2. See also Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, “Sexual Equality in Soviet Policy: A Developmental Perspective,” in *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 115-38, esp. 119-24; and Janet E. Maher, “The Social Composition of Women Deputies in Soviet Elective Politics: A Preliminary Analysis of Official Biographies,” in *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Tova Yedlin (New York: Praeger, 1980), 185-211, esp. 186.

⁶ Barbara Wolfe Jancar, “Neofeminism in Yugoslavia: A Closer Look,” *Women and Politics* 8, no. 1 (1988): 1-30, esp. 15.

⁷ John Kosti, “From Courtyard to Cabinet: The Political Emergence of Albanian Women,” in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 138-51, quotation on 144.

⁸ Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), esp. chap. 5.

⁹ Sharon L. Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality: The Status of Women in Eastern Europe” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980), esp. chap. 6, quotation on 313. See also Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon, 1974).

policies and have shown that women's groups participated; however, none, with the exception of political scientist Joanna Goven, have specifically focused on how gender affected propaganda.¹⁰

Enlightening and educating women, often depicted as "backward," about national and international political, economic, and social developments was important to League activism throughout the communist period. But especially in the years of political consolidation under the Communist Party and during the stalinist era, these were central stated goals. This chapter examines specifically the role that the League played in instructing women about the new political system, in spreading party propaganda, and in raising new socialist women in these two periods. I first assess the League's participation in popularizing both the 1946 referendum and the supposedly free elections that followed in 1947. The League was perceived as important in directing women to vote along the party line. I then move to a brief discussion of the Communist Party women's merge with Socialist Party women within the League and the final consolidation under the Polish United Workers' Party, showing that this takeover occurred not only in high politics but also on the level of women's organizations.

Since political education of women was by far the most prevalent during the stalinist period, the bulk of this chapter analyzes propaganda "work among women" during that time. Specifically, I examine a brief experiment of spreading propaganda through the use of members who served as *przodownice społeczne* (defined here as agitators) between 1949 and 1952/1953. Introduced in 1949 as part of competitions among chapters, by the middle of that year the organization viewed *przodownice społeczne* as the single most important method for "expanding, and simultaneously deepening and strengthening" the League's work.¹¹ Trained by the League and party, agitators' role was to spread messages to women predominantly through the use of individual conversation. Their task was to "enlighten" or "inform" women, who were often depicted as "backward," about national and international developments, while adhering to the party line. In addition to analyzing the topics that

¹⁰ Goven has provided the only detailed study of the gendered nature of propaganda and discourse women's groups used in their attempts to reach other women. She has centered her work on discursive analysis of texts that the Hungarian women's organization produced in relation to the construction of gender and gender politics regarding women's emancipation specifically. Joanna Goven, "The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-politics of Anti-feminism, 1948-1990" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992), esp. chap. 2.

¹¹ Zofia Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, "Wytyczne pracy oświatowej," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1949): 41-47, quotation on 42.

agitators addressed, I consider why the party utilized the League in its effort and the group's specific manner of addressing women about party goals. By examining female agitators within an organization, I analyze a specific method of spreading propaganda among women, a topic that no study has addressed to date, and show one of the important ways in which women's groups in Eastern Europe participated in these efforts.¹² I illustrate how complexly gendered the League's propaganda work was. League documents, conference proceedings, agitators' reports, and internal publications reveal agitators as both active agents expressing their enthusiasm about their experiences as well as agents of the state. Although the League continued to engage in party propaganda throughout the communist period to some degree, these efforts became less important for the organization's goals following stalinism.

¹² Female agitators probably existed in women's organizations in other Eastern European countries as well. Joanna Goven and Éva Fodor have discovered preliminary information on agitation in the Hungarian women's group. The organization trained agitators to conduct work among rural and urban women; these agitators went door to door to encourage (or even "threaten," as Fodor has stated) women to enter the workforce. Not surprisingly, women did not always welcome them. Literary theorist (who has also conducted work in history) Libora Oates-Idruchová suspects that this form of agitation existed in the Union of Czechoslovak Women as well. During the stalinist period, communist parties throughout the region attempted to instill some sense of homogeneity with the backing of the Soviet Union. Because other types of organizations, such as youth groups and trade unions, had an agitational component, she has speculated that women's groups likewise participated in this type of propaganda method. Joanna Goven, personal correspondence with author, September 2001; Éva Fodor, personal correspondence with author, February 2002; and Libora Oates-Idruchová, personal correspondence with author, February 2002. Agitators are also mentioned in Andrea Pető, "'As He Saw Her': Gender Politics in Secret Party Reports in Hungary during the 1950s," in *Women in History—Women's History: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, ed. Andrea Pető and Mark Pittaway (Budapest: Central European University, 1994), 107-117, esp. 110. In her study of *Bolshevichki* (Bolshevik women), historian Barbara Evans Clements briefly examines Bolshevik women's role as agitators during the revolutionary year of 1917 and likewise addresses the issue of "work among women." In their efforts, Bolshevik women wrote newspaper articles and pamphlets, spoke to sympathizers in their neighborhoods, trained workers and soldiers in spreading "the party's message among their mates," and spoke publicly to both men and women at large gatherings. They also specifically attempted to reach women through trade unions with many female members and through the periodical *Rabotnitsa* (The Female Worker). Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. chap. 3, quotation on 126. The *Zhenotdel's* role in spreading official policy and mobilizing women for the revolution and socialism by conducting "work among women" has been well-documented. On the *Zhenotdel*, see, for example, Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978); Wood, *Baba and the Comrade*; Carol Eubanks Hayden, "The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party," *Russian History* 3, no. 2 (1976): 150-73; and Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Hertfordshire, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), esp. chap. 2.

Building a Socialist Party-State: Educating Women about the Referendum and Elections

The immediate postwar era witnessed a gradual consolidation of political power under the Polish Workers' Party, which was finally solidified in December 1948 under the Polish United Workers' Party (i.e., Communist Party).¹³ In the process, Communist Party leaders recognized the importance of incorporating all Poles into the political transformation, including women. The League assisted the party by popularizing, among other things, two important votes along party lines: the 1946 referendum and the elections that followed. As citizens of the state with voting rights and as mothers of future generations, women needed to be politically educated about voting appropriately and thereby ensuring Communist Party victory. League members were to disseminate official party messages among women specifically in an effort to garner support for the party and build up the socialist state.

The 30 June 1946 referendum consisted of three questions that asked voters if they favored the abolition of the Senate, approved recent reforms dealing primarily with the economy and land, and accepted Poland's new western borders. Communist Party leaders urged voters to answer "yes" to all the questions, often using the slogan "Three Times Yes." Other groups in Poland saw the referendum as voting for or against the Communist Party and called for a vote of "no" on one or more of the questions, especially the first question, or altogether encouraged voters to boycott the vote.¹⁴

The League followed party dictates by encouraging women to answer "Three Times Yes." Four days prior to the vote, the League was among about twenty-five parties/organizations that signed an appeal to the Polish nation urging Poles to vote affirmatively.¹⁵ Throughout Poland, the Communist Party spread propaganda by plastering cities and towns with millions of posters, printing and

¹³ On the communist takeover, see Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, trans. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Kersten has argued that for the Polish case, the takeover actually began as early as 1943 in the midst of World War II.

¹⁴ The Polish Peasant Party was the strongest and most visible opponent. Its leaders encouraged voters to go to the polls but to vote against the Senate question. In the process, these leaders were arrested, threatened, and harassed. See especially, Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, esp. chap. 6; and Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, trans. Jane Cave (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 177-86.

¹⁵ Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, 273.

distributing leaflets, and promoting the vote in radio broadcasts and newspapers.¹⁶ The League assisted by organizing various demonstrations, lectures, conferences, and trips to rural areas, as well as publishing brochures and articles in its magazine, all specifically in an effort to reach women.¹⁷

While propaganda geared toward the general public stressed national sentiment, particularly against the possibility of German revanchism, as well as economic growth and rule of the people,¹⁸ League propaganda incorporated gendered arguments that focused on women's specific responsibilities. In the popular women's magazine *Kobieta dzisiejsza* (Today's woman), for instance, one article maintained that women had to "understand . . . these questions to be able to give an answer consistent with our conscience, consistent with our interests as women: wives and mothers, consistent with the interests of our nation."¹⁹ By answering "yes," the unnamed author continued, women voted for peace and against the Germans as well as other "warmongers." At the same time, they voted "for a democratic People's Poland, for a . . . quick rebuilding of our country, for a safe future for our children, [and] for assurance of health, education, good employment, and [fair] compensation for children."²⁰ The author used general arguments in combination with maternal ones. Not only as citizens but also as mothers, women had a responsibility to vote "yes." Following the referendum, *Kobieta dzisiejsza* published the party's official results, showing victory for the Communist Party.²¹

¹⁶ Ibid., 271-72.

¹⁷ "Pracujemy," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 8 (1 July 1946): 16-17; "Wnioski z referendum," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 9 (15 July 1946): 14; "Udział i współpraca Ligi w głosowaniu ludowym," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 9 (15 July 1946): 15; and Kierownik Wydziału Organizacyjnego, "Sprawozdanie z pracy Sp. Ob. Ligi Kobiet wojew. Krakowskiego," 9 April 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wzdyiał Kobiocy, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 347, APK.

¹⁸ Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, 271-72.

¹⁹ "Kobiety przy urnach wyborczych głosowania ludowego," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 7 (15 June 1946): 6-7, quotation on 6.

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ "Wyniki głosowania," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 9 (15 July 1946): 23. Following the referendum, Polish Peasant Party leaders maintained that approximately 83 percent of Poles had voted against the Senate in districts where the opposition was allowed to count the votes, but Communist Party officials claimed that 68 percent had voted for it. Although it is impossible to ascertain an accurate count, since Communist Party representatives destroyed or did not count numerous results and Polish Peasant Party leaders were not allowed to count votes in all districts, the majority of Poles voted against the first question and many voted against the other two questions as well. See Kersten, *Establishment of*

As historian R. J. Crampton has stated, “the referendum vote was a dress rehearsal for” the 19 January 1947 elections to Poland’s Parliament, in which Poles were coerced into voting for the Democratic Bloc.²² Once again the League’s task was to spread official party policy, and like for the referendum, members organized various gatherings for women and published articles encouraging women to vote “appropriately.”²³ The League’s Central Administration created and distributed various leaflets and instructed chapters to run lectures and discussions on such topics as why the League supported the Democratic Bloc and what women should know about electoral law.²⁴ In January, in the town of Limanowa, for example, nine women, two of whom were League members, traveled throughout the area distributing newspapers and brochures and presenting lectures on women and elections to “backward” people who claimed not to understand what the Democratic Bloc was.²⁵ Women were perceived as politically immature and in need of education about the election process and the socialist system by already politically conscious and enlightened women. Following the rigged election, which resulted in an overwhelming victory of the Democratic Bloc, an article in *Kobieta dzisiejsza* claimed that women “proved their political maturity.”²⁶ Only by following Communist Party initiatives were women portrayed as politically knowledgeable. The notion of women’s “political maturity,” however, was shortlived; throughout the stalinist period, League and party leaders typically portrayed women as “backward” and in constant need of enlightenment.

Communist Rule, 280-82, 285-86 on referendum results. Paczkowski has maintained that at least 75 percent of voters voted against the Communist Party. Paczkowski, *Spring Will Be Ours*, 182.

²² R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1994), 220. The Democratic Bloc consisted of Socialist Party, Communist Party, Peasant Party, and Democratic Party constituents, but omitted the Polish Peasant Party. Secret voting was largely ignored. Poles were led collectively to the polls and were forced to vote for the Bloc. Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, 338; and Paczkowski, *Spring Will Be Ours*, 186.

²³ SOLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Głównego Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet za pierwsze półrocze 1947 r.* (Warsaw: ZG SOLK, 1947), 4-5, File “Liga Kobiet, 1945-1950,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN; “Krótki zarys założenia Ligi Kobiet na terenie woj. Krakowskiego,” 8 March 1965, File “Historia Ligi Kobiet,” in personal possession of Barbara K.; and Kierownik Wydziału Organizacyjnego, “Sprawozdanie z pracy Sp. Ob. Ligi Kobiet wojew. Krakowskiego.”

²⁴ SOLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Głównego*, 6.

²⁵ Michalina Nawara, “Sprawozdanie z działalności przedwyborczej Społecznej-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet w Limanowej,” 10 February 1947, File “Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948,” sygn. PPR Kr 345, APK.

The League assisted the Communist Party in the rigged referendum and elections by disseminating information to and attempting to instruct supposedly politically backward women about the electoral process and the “correct” way to vote as women, often using rhetoric of motherhood. In the process, the organization took part in creating the Democratic Bloc under the authority of the party and thereby building the socialist party-state. Politically enlightened women (League members among them) played an active role in the process, while politically unenlightened women were depicted as important potential actors who needed to be educated about their supposed significant position within the state.

Propaganda work was by no means over with the elections. In fact, it became even a greater focal point for the League during the stalinist period. Furthermore, throughout the rest of the communist period, one of the League’s primary roles was to continue to popularize official elections and policy. Its internal bulletin consistently included information about upcoming elections in an effort to continue its political-ideological education of women and to perpetuate the existing political system.

From Multiple Women’s Groups to One Mass Women’s Organization

In the immediate postwar era, a number of women’s organizations reemerged from the underground to function for a brief period. By 1948, however, before they were able to gain significant support and membership, they were coopted by the League or altogether abolished.²⁷ This situation was unique neither to Poland nor to women’s organizations. In Hungary, over two hundred women’s groups functioned between 1945 and 1951, but by 1951 leaders of these groups were arrested and their organizations were dissolved. As Andrea Pető has stated, “the charity function of women’s associations was taken over by state institutions, religious women’s associations were absorbed by the church, and

²⁶ St. Dłuska, “Po wyborach,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 3 (February 1947): 20.

²⁷ Zofia Sokół, “Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny na łamach prasy kobiecej (1945-1990),” in *Polskie oblicza feminizmu: Materiały z konferencji ‘Polskie oblicza feminizmu’ Uniwersytet Warszawski 8 marca 1999 roku*, ed. Weronika Chańska and Danuta Ulicka (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki, Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2000), 66-85, esp. 73, and Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945-95* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1998), 135. See also Romana Lewandowska, “Społeczno-polityczne przesłanki powstania Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1985): 23-26.

political mobilization was undertaken exclusively by” the Democratic Association of Hungarian Women, the Hungarian mass women’s organization.²⁸ In Czechoslovakia, numerous interwar groups reemerged and women’s sections were created in various political parties. By 1948, only one organization was allowed to exist.²⁹ Various youth groups within Poland also were consolidated under the new name *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej* (Union of Polish Youth) during a congress held in July 1948, against the wishes of the individual organizations. The Union had different goals than the previous groups and was directly tied to the Communist Party.³⁰ And in 1949, the *Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację* (Union of Combatants for Freedom and Democracy) united eleven organizations that had been formed following World War II. Members of these groups included partisans, soldiers, and concentration camp survivors. The Communist Party had supported the formation of these individual groups, yet by 1949 moved away from pluralism and consolidated them.³¹

As early as 1946, authorities refused to legalize the *Ludowe Zrzeszenie Kobiet* (Populist Association of Women).³² Catholic women’s organizations were legal until 1948.³³ Such organizations as the *Demokratyczny Klub Kobiet* (Democratic Women’s Club), *Liga Kooperatystek* (League of

²⁸ Andrea Pető, “Women’s Associations in Hungary: Demobilization and Remobilization, 1945-1951,” in *When the War Was Over: Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*, ed. Claire Duchon and Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 132-45, quotation on 141. See also Andrea Pető, “Continuity in Change: Hungarian Women’s Organizations,” in *Pink, Purple, Green: Women’s, Religious, Environmental and Gay/Lesbian Movements in Central Europe Today*, ed. Helena Flam (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 2001), 47-53, esp. 47-48, Andrea Pető, *Nőhistóriák: A politizáló nők történetéből, 1945-1951* (Budapest: Seneca, 1998), 180-83; and Goven, “Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism,” 33.

²⁹ Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality,” 305, 312.

³⁰ Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 31-32; and Hillebrandt, “Stołeczna organizacja ZMP.” On the range of youth groups functioning in Warsaw prior to this consolidation, see Tadeusz Sierocki, “Polityczne organizacje młodzieżowe w Warszawie (1944-1948),” in *Postępowe organizacje młodzieżowe w Warszawie*, 187-220; and in Poland in general, see Hillebrandt, *Polskie organizacje młodzieżowe*, 209-78.

³¹ Joanna Wawrzyniak, “Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację: Ewolucja ideologii a więź grupowa,” in *PRL: Trwanie i zmiana*, ed. Dariusz Stola and Marcin Zaremba (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania im. Leona Koźmińskiego, 2003), 351-72.

³² Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, 196-97.

³³ Małgorzata Fidelis, personal correspondence with author, February 2004.

Female Cooperatives), and the Polish section of the *Międzynarodowego Stowarzyszenia Kobiet z Wyższym Wykształceniem Uniwersyteckim* (International Association of Women with Higher University Education) were eventually absorbed into the League.³⁴ The Circles of Rural Housewives, one of the few prewar organizations that survived well into the communist (and postcommunist) period, was coopted into the League by 1948, although unlike other women's groups, it retained some autonomy and achieved full separation from the League in 1966.³⁵

In a telling article celebrating the League's twentieth anniversary in 1965, an unnamed author stated that "a fundamental mistake of the organization was unsatisfactory connections and even detachment from experienced and deserving activists of the interwar period. Not infrequently our shallow, and not sufficiently analytical, negative opinions of the women's movement after the first world war" led them to animosity toward women's activists of the interwar years. "We deprived ourselves . . . of their great experience and we lost, sometimes very valuable, productive individuals, through whose participation the work of our organization could have been substantially richer in its contents and even more attractive to women."³⁶ Sławomira Walczewska has made similar claims by arguing that the new group often alienated interwar women activists.³⁷ Although some activists of the interwar women's movement joined the postwar organization, most, both authors have argued, were ostracized and devalued by the new group. Their interwar activism, unless it was connected to leftist politics, threatened the party's goals of creating a single women's organization. Furthermore, many interwar activists, particularly after the dissolution or absorption of their own organizations, probably did not want to join the League, an organization that exhibited hostility toward their forms of activism.

The 1948 communist takeover played out not just in high politics but also on the level of women's organizations. Party leaders, League members among them, forced a merge between the

³⁴ Sławomira Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL," *Pełnym głosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 25-29, esp. 25.

³⁵ This rural organization functioned since 1886. Danuta Walocha, "Sprawozdanie z działalności Woj. Wydziału Kobiet za miesiąc sierpień 1948 r.," 6 September 1948, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 341, APK briefly mentions this unification.

³⁶ "XX," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1965): 7-65, quotation on 36.

³⁷ Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet," 25.

Communist Party's Women's Divisions and the Socialist Party's *Samodzielny Referat Kobiety* (Independent Women's Department). Women were represented in the Communist Party through the *Wydziały Kobiety* (Women's Divisions), while in the Socialist Party, they were represented through the Independent Women's Department. SOLK, a nonparty organization, included members from both parties, other parties, and women not affiliated with any political parties.³⁸ These two women's divisions held meetings together, but their cooperation was short-lived as evidenced by the situation in Kraków delineated below. Tensions between the two groups escalated by 1947.

These tensions were often related to how each party's women's group defined its relationship to the League. Women in the Communist Party complained that Socialist Party women caused problems for Communist Party workers, refused to hire them in a factory whose work council was largely composed of women affiliated with the Socialist Party, and neglected to form League chapters in workplaces.³⁹ In one factory, the League's president, a Socialist Party member, did nothing to recruit workers into the organization, the director of the Communist Women's Division maintained. She argued that League chapters were falling apart or were having difficulty forming where independent Socialist Party women's circles were being formed.⁴⁰ These circles "interfere and compete with the League of Women," since they often organized the same types of activities as the League.⁴¹ Socialist Party members supposedly were showing minimal interest in engaging in League activities and in becoming members. They did not show up to meetings or participate in League festivities or rallies,

³⁸ This structure was similar in Czechoslovakia with women's sections in major political parties and a non-partisan women's group. Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," 307.

³⁹ "Protokół: Z wspólnego zebrania aktywu kobiecego PPS i PPR," 29 July 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342; Br[onisława] Legomska to the Provincial Committee of the PPR in Kraków, Strzelecki, 27 November 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342; and "Wydział Kobiety," [1946], File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 347, all in APK. On general lack of recruitment efforts, see also "Sprawozdanie Wydziału Kobiecego w Krakowie," March 1946, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 347; Wydział Kobiety, "Sprawozdanie za miesiąc czerwiec 1946 r.," June 1946, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 347; B. Goladowa to Wydział Kobiet w Warszawie, 30 January 1948, File "Korespondencja z CKW, PK PPS, organizacji społecznych, instytucji państwowych, 1946-1948," sygn. WK PPS Kr Samodzielny Referat Kobiet 128, all in APK.

⁴⁰ Legomska to Strzelecki.

⁴¹ Incomplete excerpt, sygn. PPR Kr 342, APK.

claimed a number of Communist Party women.⁴² In 1948, women activists from the Socialist Party in the town of Bochnia even boycotted the League.⁴³

These assertions were probably largely accurate. Women in the Socialist Party increasingly showed concern over the growing politicization of the League along Communist Party lines and feared a Communist Party takeover of the supposedly nonparty group. Socialist activists complained that women in the Communist Party were not following mutually agreed upon resolutions, were bothering Socialist Party members at work, lied about party affiliation, and represented the party rather than the League.⁴⁴ Kraków's League president, a Socialist Party member, Elżbieta Mathiaszowa, spoke against party politics within the League, arguing that members should not be party representatives when on assignment for the organization and that party women should not try to recruit nonparty League members into their political groups. She also complained that decisions were being made for the League by Communist Party committees without her knowledge even though she served as the organization's leader.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Communist Party members were over represented in the League's provincial administrations.⁴⁶ Mathiaszowa, as a result, eventually decided to step down from the

⁴² Emilia Smajda and Józef Wojcik, "Sprawozdanie z Referatu Kobiecego przy Komitecie Powiatowym PPR w Bochni z miesiąca listopada 1947 r.," November 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR 343; and Józefa Smulowa, "Sprawozdanie z zebrania Społ. Obyw. Ligi Kobiet w dn. 14.9.47 w Nowym Sączu," 19 September 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 345, both in APK.

⁴³ Danuta Walocha, "Sprawozdanie z zebrania kobiet PPR w Bochni," 20 April 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR 343, APK.

⁴⁴ "Protokół: Z wspólnego zebrania aktywu kobiecego PPS i PPR"; and "Protokół: Z zebrania międzypartyjnego Wydziałów Kobietych WK PPS i KW PPR, odbytego w dniu 24.II 1948 wg. następującego porządku dziennego," 24 February 1948, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr. 342, APK.

⁴⁵ "Protokół: Z wspólnego zebrania aktywu kobiecego PPS i PPR"; Incomplete excerpt; "Protokół: Z zebrania międzypartyjnego Wydz. Kob. PPR i Sam ref Kob PPS odbytego w lokalu PPR w dniu 15.XII. 1947 roku," 15 December 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342; and J. Noskówna, "Protokół z wspólnego zebrania aktywu kobiecego PPS i PPR," 29 July 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342, all in APK.

⁴⁶ "Protokół z zebrania wspólnego Wydziału Kobiecego KW PPR i Samodzielnego Referatu Kobiet WK PPS," 7 October 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobiety, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342, APK.

president's position.⁴⁷ Although documents do not indicate whether she was forced to step down or if she made the decision personally, they do show that this situation led to her resignation.

By mid-1948, overt discussions about the unification of the parties began to take shape in meetings between the two women's divisions.⁴⁸ Bronisława Legomska, the director of the Women's Division in Kraków, stated that "we will simply try to persuade . . . or remove people who will irritate or weaken this work [cooperation between the two parties]."⁴⁹ Cooperation between the parties in reality meant a Communist Party takeover. League members, as Legomska suggested, would be forced either to participate or be removed if they chose not to cooperate. Although the League was affiliated to some degree with the Communist Party from its inception, the 1948 takeover solidified that affiliation.

By forcibly creating one mass women's organization in each of the newly formed party-states within Eastern Europe, party leaders and women activists homogenized women's needs, responsibilities, and roles.⁵⁰ Since all women were supposedly the same, there was no need to allow other more exclusive and heterogeneous women's groups to function. At the same time, these organizations took on a wide range of initiatives and goals, ranging from charitable endeavors and

⁴⁷ "Protokół: Z zebrania międzypartyjnego Wydziałów Kobięcych WK PPS i KW PPR, odbytego w dniu 24.II 1948." Marciniakowa, a PPS woman on the provincial administration, was forced to leave the League. Michniewiczowa, "Protokół z posiedzenia pow. międzypart. VI - ki kobiecej w Krakowie 14 września 1948 r., " 14 September 1948, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342, APK.

⁴⁸ "Sprawozdanie: Z obrad aktywu kobiecego PPR i PPS województwa krakowskiego odbytego w lokalu KW PPR w dniu 5-go maja 1948 r.," 5 May 1948, "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342; Danuta Walocha, "Sprawozdanie z działalności Woj. Wydziału Kobiet za miesiąc marzec 1948 r.," 6 April 1948, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 341; Wydział Kobięcy PPS and Wydział Kobięcy PPR, "Rezolucja," April 1948, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 341; Dr. Swierszczewska, "Tezy: Referatu o Jedności organicznego obu Partii i pracy Wydz. Kobięcych," n.d., File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342; Sowa and Danuta Walocha, "Rezolucja," 5 April 1948, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, Wydział Kobięcy, 1947-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 342, all in APK.

⁴⁹ "Sprawozdanie: Z obrad aktywu kobiecego PPR i PPS województwa krakowskiego odbytego w lokalu KW PPR w dniu 5-go maja 1948 r."

⁵⁰ On Hungary, see Éva Fodor, "Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary," *Gender and Society*, 16, no. 2 (April 2002): 240-63, esp. 248 and n. 6. Homogenization played out in other realms of society as well. Workers ideally were supposed to receive the same benefits and have equal access to jobs, apartments were standardized in size, and citizens were to have equal standards of living.

programs for women to the spreading of political propaganda. Through the state's dissolution of multiple women's organization and its merging of Socialist and Communist Party women, party leaders were to have greater control over women's issues and women's roles within the party-state.

League Agitators Enlightening “Backward” Women during the Stalinist Period

Following the consolidation of political parties when newly formed political systems throughout the region worked to establish legitimacy and solidify authority, often in conflict with the general population, the use of propaganda was rampant and overt. Especially during this era, creating new socialist women and mobilizing them to the socialist project was one of the major, if not the major, tasks for women's organizations.⁵¹ The League served the propaganda effort in a variety of ways, one of which was training and overseeing the work of a group of members, *przodownice społeczne*, whom the League and the party prepared to carry out “work among women.” Functioning within the League's Department of Culture and Education, this “army of individual agitators,” as they were sometimes called, lost its prominent presence by late 1952 in the midst of general transformations within “work among women.”⁵²

Given the nature of sources produced in the stalinist era, it is difficult to determine the extent to which agitators accomplished their tasks or to assess whether or not the encounters between agitators and women included in reports and conference proceedings actually occurred. Much of the wording in League publications and documents suggests that at the very least some agitators did indeed carry out

⁵¹ For Czechoslovakia, see Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality,” 311-22. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska has stated that increasing women's political awareness was key during this period. To accomplish this, the League replaced courses in home economics with courses and conferences focused on ideological schooling. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet (na przykładzie badań na Białostoczyźnie)* (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW w Białymstoku, 1984), 124-25.

⁵² “Sprawozdanie z plenum,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (February 1950): 30-35, quotation on 34; and “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad II-go dnia Konferencji Krajowej Ligi Kobiet w dniu 26.IX.1949 r.,” 26 September 1949, File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-28, AAN. In Łódź, agitators were depicted as “soldiers in the great battle for socialism in Poland.” See Stanisława Zawadecka, “Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet i wytyczne na rok 1950,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (February 1950): 15-26, quotation on 19.

their responsibilities.⁵³ Some wording, though, particularly in the internal bulletins (*Nasza praca* [Our work] and *Poznajmy prawdę* [Let's learn the truth]), suggests instruction of agitators as the main purpose. Recounting exemplary incidents in publications (whether or not they actually transpired) served as a way to direct agitators' work. In contrast, unpublished chapter reports, which each chapter produced regularly, were not used as instructional documents. Only a small group of upper-level League leaders and some party officials had access to them. As a result, these internal reports were more likely to include tasks that agitators accomplished; they served as a mechanism to determine the measure of success of League initiatives and to assess the effects of its programs. However, chapters may well have embellished the truth in these reports to impress leaders or to win ongoing competitions among chapters, which were largely based on such reporting. Embellished or falsified incidents as well as such propaganda tactics and rituals as "criticism and self-criticism," I believe, were presented simultaneously with genuine expressions of actual experiences from the field in reports and publications. Although I recognize the problematic nature of these sources, I stress the possibility that agitators' statements and actions are in part genuine. The combination of positive propaganda, expectation of criticism, and genuine sentiments present a more balanced picture of the stalinist era than expected. Furthermore, since I am as interested in agitators' importance to the Polish party-state as in what they accomplished, ongoing detailed instructions demonstrate the significance of this type of work to socialist propaganda campaigns.

The League used a combination of written, visual, and oral methods in spreading party messages among women. The use of oral propaganda was especially significant in reaching women. Oral agitation consisted of mass, group, and individual efforts, all of which the League employed in its propaganda work.⁵⁴ In mass agitation, League leaders or agitators presented lectures in large gatherings held in auditoriums, outdoors in large open spaces, or in workplaces. The League, for example, organized these meetings to present work-related issues in factories; discuss the importance of collectivization and linking the countryside with the city in rural areas; and celebrate such holidays as

⁵³ League agitators, for example, relayed personal experiences at the national agitators' conference in 1949 in a way that appears genuine. "Stenogram z południowych obrad."

⁵⁴ Robert Conquest has differentiated among these types of oral agitation in Robert Conquest, *The Politics of Ideas in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 114.

International Women's Day, May 1st, or Mother's Day.⁵⁵ In small group agitation, members or specialists on a given topic provided information to a group of listeners either informally in *pogadanki* (discussions or chats) or formally in *referaty* (lectures) and *odczyty* (readings), all of which were usually held in chapter offices or community centers.⁵⁶

Przodownice społeczne typically utilized individual agitation to disseminate information among women. Unlike other forms of propaganda (such as planned meetings and lectures), agitators were to have systematic, constant, and often spontaneous contact with masses of women either in small groups or more commonly individually.⁵⁷ Individual and informal chats with coworkers, neighbors, friends, and family was a crucial form of agitation for *przodownice społeczne*. Since many women were yet to be employed outside the home and therefore had less contact with propaganda than working women, agitators sought out residential areas in particular. Housewives were more dispersed and less likely to attend organized meetings than workers, and hence were much more difficult to organize. In contrast, working women encountered propaganda regularly in places of employment through individual agitation, planned lectures, and *gazety ścienne* (wall newspapers, i.e., bulletin boards).

Agitators came to their task recommended by employers, friends, or fellow party and/or League members. In 1949, the League hoped to have at least 10 percent of all members in each chapter fulfill agitational responsibilities, but the organization typically was more concerned about quality than quantity.⁵⁸ Without a candidate's knowledge, group leaders observed candidates' performance and

⁵⁵ Kuśmierski and Frydrychowicz discuss these types of meetings in general in Kuśmierski and Frydrychowicz, *Podstawy wiedzy o propagandzie*, esp. 240-43. On large festivities for 8 March, see, for example, "Instrukcja na 8 marca," *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (February 1950): 15-19; and "Jak zorganizujemy akademię 8-marcową w kole blokowym," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1953): 23-24.

⁵⁶ See Kuśmierski and Frydrychowicz, *Podstawy wiedzy o propagandzie*, 172-75 for descriptions of *pogadanki*. Urszula P. described these types of meetings in her interview as well. Urszula P., interview by author, Łódź, 27 March 2000.

⁵⁷ Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, "Wytyczne pracy oświatowej."

⁵⁸ ZGLK, "Instrukcja w sprawie przodownic społecznych," 24 June 1949, File "KC PZPR," sygn. 237/XV-29, AAN. It is surprising that the League at times was more concerned with quality over quantity given the state's more typical focus on measuring success based on quantitative methods. It is difficult to determine definitively how many chapters reached this goal of 10 percent and how many women functioned as agitators. Sources indicate that close to forty thousand agitators served in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but as with all statistics from the stalinist period, we have to take these numbers

attitudes in the workplace as well as behavior outside of the working environment before selecting women for the task.⁵⁹ Following these close observations, if “the candidate always behave[d] how an agitator [was] always supposed to behave, then she enter[ed] into the work of agitators.”⁶⁰ After being selected for this position, agitators attended courses in which they received instruction in party ideology and methods of agitation. They received ongoing training through regular meetings and courses, *Poznajmy prawdę* and *Nasza praca*, local and national newspapers (especially *Trybuna ludu*, The People’s Tribune, the official party paper), and radio news broadcasts.⁶¹ Using knowledge they acquired from these sources, agitators spread the party’s message orally to other women, thereby significantly expanding their audience.

League publications presented the ideal *przodownice społeczne* in direct opposition to their female listeners.⁶² According to 1949 instructions from the Central Administration to chapters, an agitator was to be a member who “[was] politically knowledgeable, . . . possesse[d] a certain authority

cautiously. See, for example, “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad.” One source places the number as high as sixty-nine thousand. Irena Sztachelska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet w świetle uchwały Biura Politycznego KC PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (April 1950): 3-17, esp. 10. Even an official League document suggested that these numbers reflected the formal reports from provincial administrations listing numbers of agitators, but not the numbers of women who actively functioned in this role. See “Projekt instrukcji w sprawie pracy przodownic społecznych,” n.d., File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-29, AAN. Another source states that only about twenty thousand agitators functioned in early 1952. “Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet o zadaniach organizacyjnych w roku 1952,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (April 1952): 15-24, esp. 20. A League member, Romana Lewandowska, later claimed that 160,000 agitators functioned throughout the period. Romana Lewandowska, “Założenia programowe Ligi Kobiet i ich realizacja (2),” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1985): 16-20, esp. 17.

⁵⁹ Agitators were instructed to form groups of up to twenty women, with one woman (a party member) chosen as group leader. The group leader was responsible for choosing new agitators, supervising their work, and running and organizing regular meetings. “Projekt instrukcji.”

⁶⁰ “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad.”

⁶¹ On schooling of League members, see, for example, “Masowe szkolenie aktywistek Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 13 (July-August 1950): 53-56; I[rena] Nowakowska, “Instrukcja w sprawie szkolenia ideologicznego aktywu Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1952): 20-22; J. Juzionowa, “Szkolenie masowe Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1952): 26-32; and K. Lefikowa, “Pogłębianie wiedzy ideologicznej – podstawowym zadaniem aktywistki Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (November 1953): 28-29. Political education was an important aspect of mobilizing the masses throughout the region.

⁶² In her study of the *Zhenotdel*, Wood has also found that in the revolutionary period in Russia, Bolshevik leaders viewed women as especially in need of being enlightened and of being transformed from the “*baba*” (a pejorative term for woman, particularly a rural woman), whom the state viewed as backward, superstitious, and conservative, into the “comrade,” one who was an active participant in the party-state. Wood, *Baba and the Comrade*.

among women, . . . [was] trusted by them, . . . possesse[d] a gift in convincing others and a skill [or comfort] in associating with them,” and finally, in workplaces, was a reliable, productive employee. Through their lifestyles, employment, and social and political activism, they were also to act as role models for other women by providing a good example of citizenship and patriotism.⁶³ *Przodownice społeczne* were most typically depicted positively as “active,” “outstanding,” and “patriotic” citizens, who acted as “role models” for “backward” women. Unlike their audience, they were already “enlightened” politically and socially and “informed” about their rights and responsibilities in the new political order.⁶⁴

The League’s responsibility was to create a new type of woman, who was “knowledgeable and devoted to socialism.”⁶⁵ In her discussion of directives for the year 1950, League secretary Stanisława Zawadecka, conveyed the importance of *przodownice społeczne* in the creation of a new woman by claiming that “there does not exist a more honorable and responsible task than educating a new person.”⁶⁶ Agitators’ responsibility was to “enlighten,” “educate,” “train,” “mold,” and “inform,” the masses of “uneducated,” “unaware,” “backward,” “weak,” and “complaining” women, who were often viewed as threats to the new system and as easily manipulated by class enemies.⁶⁷ Although the

⁶³ ZGLK, “Instrukcja w sprawie przodownic społecznych.” See also Irena Nowakowska, “Legitymacja przodownicy społecznej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (May 1952): 23-25; “Projekt instrukcji”; Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, “Wytyczne pracy oświatowej”; and “Instrukcja w sprawie pracy przodownic społecznych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 15-16 (August 1951): 7-16.

⁶⁴ For some examples, see “Osium lat ludowej ojczyzny,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 7 (1952): 1-39; “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad”; Z[uzanna] Sobierajska, “Wytyczne pracy Wydziału Kulturalno-Oświatowego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (March 1950): 16-28; I[rena] N[owakowska], “Odprawa w sprawie pracy przodownic społecznych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 15-16 (August 1951): 3-6; and “Instrukcja w sprawie pracy przodownic społecznych.”

⁶⁵ Alicja Musiałowa, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet w świetle uchwał IV Plenum KC PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 13 (July-August 1950): 3-13, quotation on 8. Regarding creating a new socialist woman, see also Edwarda Orłowska, “Przemówienie posłanki Orłowskiej: (podsumowanie wyników I-szej Krajowej Odprawy Sekretarzy: Zarządów Pow LK w Warszawie w dn. 30 czerwca 1950 r.),” *Nasza praca*, no. 13 (July-August 1950): 24-43.

⁶⁶ Zawadecka, “Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet,” 25.

⁶⁷ Party leaders (and propaganda) characterized any illeged opponents of the party and socialist state as falling into various categories of criminals, all of which fell under the rubric of class enemy. In theory, anyone could become identified as a class enemy. For some examples, see “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad”; “Sprawozdanie: Praca przodownic społecznych na terenie Łodzi, 24.IX.49 r.,” 24 November 1949, File “KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety – KW Łódź,” sygn. 237/XV-17, AAN;

League instructed *przodowice społeczne* to approach their female listeners in a “sisterly” manner, they constructed these “sisters” as politically unenlightened and disclosed a division between enlightened women, who sided with and actively participated in the socialist state, and “backward” women (often nonworking and rural women), who desperately needed to be educated about the benefits of that state.⁶⁸ Agitators attempted to transform the unenlightened “backward” woman into an enlightened comrade. As a result of their work, these “backward” women ideally were to become female agitators, as well as League and party members.

General Party Goals and Women’s Issues in Agitators’ Efforts

The main topics *przodownice społeczne*, as well as the League in general, addressed in their propaganda efforts typically paralleled or were closely tied to other goals and issues that the party deemed important for both women and men for the development of socialism within Poland and in other parts of Eastern Europe. Agitators throughout the region depicted adoration of the Soviet Union and the supposed accomplishments of the people’s democracies, warned against the dangers of fascism and capitalism, stimulated enthusiasm for production plans, advocated agricultural cooperatives, presented antireligious opinions, supported and publicized elections, and promoted the socialist camp as the greatest force for pacifism. In their arguments, League agitators also often used gender-specific issues and gendered language to convince their female audience of the advantages of socialism. Although the League discussed women’s emancipation and gender equality, the organization typically subordinated these topics to general party goals.

An undated instruction to the Central Administration from an unspecified source and a 1951 article in *Nasza praca* delineated the *przodownica społeczna*’s basic responsibilities. These two texts,

“Osium lat ludowej ojczyzny”; Nowakowska, “Legitymacja przodownicy społecznej”; “Zadania przodownic społecznych na odcinku pogłębienia socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 5 (1950): 33-38; Dorota Kłuszyńska, *Co Polska Ludowa dała kobietom* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1950), 72; and Irena Sztachelska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet w walce o pokój,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1949): 3-14, esp. 11-12.

⁶⁸ “Kto to jest przodownica społeczna i na czym polega jej praca?” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1949): 7-11, quotation on 10.

almost identical in wording, directed female agitators to “carry truth to the masses of women, uncover falsehood and slander that imperialists and their agents have propagated, explain how the strength of the peace camp led by the heroic Soviet Union is growing, instruct others about the significant gains of the Soviet Union and countries of the people’s democracy,” and encourage all women to become involved in economic production to meet the goals of the Six-Year Plan. They were to promote the idea that all women “were joint managers of the country, responsible for its misfortunes.” Furthermore, these documents instructed *przodownice społeczne* to inform women about the benefits People’s Poland had given them, educate them about “past achievements of our Fatherland, awaken a national pride in them, point to the magnificent developmental perspectives standing before our country and its citizens, [and] make every woman a conscious” participant in the building of socialism.⁶⁹

The peace campaign and mobilization of women to work became the most important assignments for the organization.⁷⁰ A League vice-president Zofia Wasilkowska welcomed the delegates to the 1949 national conference with a speech that distinctly linked these two issues. She stated that the strengthening of peace throughout the world was dependent on women’s commitment to work.⁷¹ In his presentation to the delegates at the 1951 League national congress, Aleksander Zawadzki, party secretary and Poland’s vice premier, spoke of the significance of the slogan of peace and the Six-Year Plan. Among other tasks, members’ assignment, he stated, “will be to go with this slogan to the masses of women, enlighten them about the entire depth and meaning of this slogan, arm them with the ideological and political parts of this slogan, . . . [and] resist the class enemy and imperialist agents.”⁷² At the congress, League President Alicja Musiałowa likewise spoke about Polish

⁶⁹ “Projekt instrukcji”; and “Instrukcja w sprawie pracy przodownic społecznych,” 7.

⁷⁰ These were also the central goals for the Union of Polish Youth. Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 40-41. In general, mobilizing citizens to the Six-Year Plan and peace was central to the party’s goals. Zaremba, “Komunizm jako system mobilizacyjny,” 114-15.

⁷¹ “Krajowa Konferencja Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1949): 14-23.

⁷² Aleksander Zawadzki, “Przemówienie Aleksandra Zawadzkiego Sekretarza KC PZPR Vicepremiera,” Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, *Nasza praca*, no. 6-7 (March-April 1951), 7-14, quotation on 10.

women's duty in the peace campaign and production plans, demonstrating the importance of these two issues for the organization.⁷³

Not surprisingly, following a war that destroyed much of Europe and resulted in a significant loss of human life, peace became a desired goal worldwide and the single most important issue *przodownice społeczne* and the League raised.⁷⁴ In Poland, as in other parts of Eastern Europe, however, the seemingly noncontroversial peace campaign became synonymous with industrialization, collectivization, adoration of the Soviet Union, anticapitalism, and socialism in general. Peace was not only an aim in and of itself but also was tied to other goals that party leaders deemed important. Although peace campaigns throughout the world traditionally have been connected to women's activism, in the case of Eastern Europe, peace campaigns were promoted for both women and men, due especially to the underlying meaning of these campaigns.⁷⁵

The inaugural issue of *Poznajmy prawdę* in 1949, for example, demonstrates the importance of the peace struggle for the League and its connection to other goals. In the first article, "Kobiety! Polki! Matki! Żony i Siostry" (Women! Polish Women! Mothers! Wives and Sisters!), all women were called to think about the upcoming Peace Day on 2 October.

Woman, who desires peace! Remember! If you increase the quantity and quality of your work, if you meticulously comply with work discipline—you ensure the victory of peace! If you increase production in agriculture and animal husbandry—you are fighting for the victory of peace! If you obtain bricks for the rebuilding of Warsaw, clean and beautify your city, neighborhood, street, or house—you are fighting for peace! If you are battling with ignorance, educating illiterates—you are protecting peace! If you are teaching children love for the People's Fatherland—you are serving the peace issue! If you are propagating friendship with Soviet heroines—you are ensuring peace! If you are helping women fighters in Greece, Spain, France, Italy, and People's China—you are battling for the peace issue! . . . You are also fighting for peace when you denounce the enemy.⁷⁶

⁷³ Alicja Musiałowa, "Zadania kobiet polskich w walce o pokój i plan 6-letni," Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, 22-41, quotation on 35.

⁷⁴ *Nasza praca* published legion articles about peace. Dariusz Jarosz and Maria Pasztor have provided an interesting brief chapter on the importance of peace throughout the communist world in the late 1940s and peasants' reactions' reactions to propaganda surrounding this issue. Dariusz Jarosz and Maria Pasztor, *W krzywym zwierciadle: Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w świetle plotek i pogłosek z lat 1949-1956* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Fakt, 1991), chap. 4.

⁷⁵ Both women and men were encouraged to enter peace activism as evidenced by numerous articles published on peace in the national party paper, *Trybuna ludu*, and men's participation in various peace congresses.

⁷⁶ "Kobiety! Polki! Matki! Żony i Siostry!" *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1949): 1-5, quotation on 2.

Peace, then, was linked to all of these issues: production, work competition, agriculture, illiteracy, and the class enemy. Furthermore, the organization also used the peace slogan to recruit women into the League; every Polish woman desiring peace was encouraged to join.⁷⁷

More than any other connections, the League linked the peace movement with economic production plans. The resolution from the 1949 national conference maintained that by contributing to the building of People's Poland, industrial and agricultural production, and other areas of life, women were strengthening international peace forces. To intensify the peace movement, the League, among other goals, decided to recruit new members, especially urban and rural housewives; participate in work competition; and improve production quality.⁷⁸ Two years later, at the 1951 national congress, speakers reiterated this link. Musiałowa claimed that Polish women "have to achieve peace through working on strengthening the potential of protecting our country, through working on realizing the Six-Year Plan."⁷⁹ By actively participating in production and the development of industrialization, improving their occupational skills, increasing their educational levels, managing the family budget, and raising their children well, claimed one article, women contributed to strengthening peace forces in Poland.⁸⁰ Women were to "remember that every ton of coal beyond the plan, every meter of fabric, every new house, [and] finally every productive effort from the working masses is one more brick in the work of strengthening world peace."⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid., esp. 5. In November 1950, Poland hosted the international conference for the World Peace Congress in which the League took an active part. Following the conference, League members were to popularize the meeting's resolutions by organizing discussions and mobilizing *przodownice społeczne*. The organization also was involved in obtaining signatures for various petitions dealing with the peace campaign. On the League's involvement in the conference and the petitions, as well as the connections the League made between peace and other issues, see, for example, "Zadania przodownic społecznych w związku z Narodowym Plebiscytem Pokoju," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3-4 (1951): 1-37; "Wytoczne III-go etapu współzawodnictwa Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1949): 32-41; Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, "Wytoczne pracy oświatowej"; "Po II Światowym Kongresie Obrońców Pokoju w Warszawie," *Nasza praca*, no. 20 (December 1950): 3-15; "Instrukcja: Narodowy Plebiscyt Pokoju," *Nasza praca*, no. 8-9 (April-May 1951): 3-6; and Alicja Musiałowa, "Zadania Ligi Kobiet w świetle uchwał IV Plenum KC PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 13 (July-August 1950): 3-13."

⁷⁸ "Krajowa Konferencja Ligi Kobiet."

⁷⁹ Musiałowa, "Zadania kobiet polskich w walce o pokój i plan 6-letni," 27.

⁸⁰ "Zadania przodownic społecznych w związku z Narodowym Plebiscytem Pokoju," 36.

⁸¹ "W 6-ą rocznicę Manifestu Lipcowego," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 6 (1950): 1-6, quotation on 2-3.

While advocating such general party objectives as production, peace, and anticapitalism, agitators' work was also gendered. The League served as an important potential bridge between the party and masses of women. *Przodownice społeczne* had the task of focusing their attention specifically on increasing women's, not all citizens', political and social consciousness and including women in reaching party goals. Through the League, propaganda campaigns were supposed to reach working and nonworking women and to inform them about their specific assignments in meeting production goals as well as the benefits they, as women, would garner from the plan. Consequently, the discourse agitators were instructed to use and many of the issues they were to raise were geared specifically to a female audience.

In presentations about peace and war, agitators regularly turned to women's maternal role and encouraged their listeners to join the socialist peace camp for the good of their children. Women as mothers, they stressed, would be interested in participating and supporting a state that would provide a peaceful and fulfilling life for their offspring and for the country as a whole. *Przodownice społeczne* also underscored the need for gender equality, particularly in the workforce, and women's employment outside the home. According to agitators, unemployment, low wages, poverty, difficulty in finding work, illnesses, violence, prostitution, suicides, poor living conditions, and lack of education characterized the previous era. The socialist state lessened these problems and eradicated unemployment for both men and women, built new factories, and needed women for production and development of socialism. Through the attainment of the production plan's objectives and women's participation in meeting its goals, women would obtain "full and actual equality" as well as "the opportunity to be included in all areas of economic, social, and cultural life."⁸² Since employment was seen as women's "only road to social advancement, [and] to full equality," *przodownice społeczne* urged women to earn their own wages and work in the same positions and facilities as men.⁸³ Agitators searched for women who were capable of working, encouraged them to take courses to improve their skills, and discussed with parents the importance of sending their daughters to schools and work. The

⁸² "Więcej kobiet do produkcji," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 7-8 (1950): 16-22, quotation on 18.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20. See also "Kobieta pracuje zawodowo," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1952): 3-28, esp. 12.

organization also promoted women's participation in work competition and urged women to become *przodownice pracy* (work leaders), who exceeded production norms.⁸⁴ Women, they maintained, would not simply obtain gender equality; they had to participate in production to earn its benefits. To promote women's entrance into the workforce, *przodownice społeczne* attempted to popularize new jobs for women in areas traditionally deemed masculine, the so-called "new occupations." They encouraged girls to enter schools in occupations and women to take courses in areas that were previously viewed as inappropriate for them.⁸⁵ The appeal to get more women involved was often gendered (i.e., as mothers, they needed to do this for the good of their children), but its purpose to a degree was to get women to behave more like men through their participation in production.

Przodownice społeczne informed women about the services that the state would provide so women could experience gender equality more fully and participate in the Six-Year Plan without worrying about their children.⁸⁶ They claimed that such services and facilities as laundries and cafeterias "guarantee[d] a woman even greater relief from her domestic responsibilities" and would liberate women and make them equal to men, as would special facilities and activities for children, including daycare, preschool, community centers, sports, summer camps, and vacations for women and their children.⁸⁷ Special services and protective legislation, they maintained, would allow a woman to

⁸⁴ Work leaders were those who won work competitions by reaching and usually significantly exceeding workplace production goals. On state-sponsored labor competitions in the Soviet bloc, see especially Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), chap. 5; Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), chap. 7; and Vladimir Andrie, *Workers in Stalin's Russia: Industrialization and Social Change in a Planned Economy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), chap. 5.

⁸⁵ ZGLK, "Okólnik No. 8," 5 July 1949, File "KC PZPR," sygn. 237/XV-29, AAN; A. R., "O niedociągnięciach i brakach w pracy przodownic społecznych," *Nasza praca*, no. 20 (December 1950): 32-34; "Kobieta pracuje zawodowo"; "Więcej kobiet do produkcji"; "Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 5 (1951): 1-31, esp. 5-6; "Ramowy plan pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1951," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (January 1951): 4-16, esp. 7-10; "Piszemy o swojej pracy," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (May 1952): 29-46, esp. 38; "Wytyczne pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1953," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1953): 3-18, esp. 7-10; and Elżbieta Wyżewska, "Nasze osiągnięcia i braki w aktywizacji zawodowej kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (May 1953): 19-20.

⁸⁶ "Więcej kobiet do produkcji," 20-22.

⁸⁷ "Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności," 16. See also, for example, "8-marca Międzynarodowy Dzień Kobiet," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1952): 3-38; "Kobieta pracuje zawodowo," esp. 22-27; "Krajowa

“healthily and quietly deliver her child, [and] allow her to raise it.”⁸⁸ Instructions urged agitators to inform women about such benefits as the twelve-week paid maternity leave, protective legislation and rights for pregnant and nursing women, free and adequate healthcare for women and their children, rights for illegitimate children, family allowances, and homes for single mothers and their children, services that new socialist states supposedly provided throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.⁸⁹ They promoted the 1950 Family Code, which the League characterized as an example of the country’s and society’s protection of mothers and children. This code, among other things, improved women’s access to child support and gave equal rights to legitimate and illegitimate children.⁹⁰

When using gendered language and addressing issues geared specifically to women, *przodownice społeczne* emphasized larger party goals over gender equality and issues that were most important to women. In popularizing “masculine” jobs among women and women’s entrance into the workforce, for example, propaganda typically cited the need for women’s hands in increasing production. To realize the Six-Year Plan, women had to be involved in greater numbers and some of their burdens had to be lifted.⁹¹ The party introduced maternity leave, family allowances, and daycare not primarily to ease women’s burden or change the traditional gendered division of labor within the home but rather to allow women to enter the work sector and thereby to contribute to production

odprawa Ligi Kobiet w sprawach opieki,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (June 1950): 34-36; and Szczesna-Bilińska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet w zakresie opieki,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (June 1950): 37-42.

⁸⁸ “Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności,” 13.

⁸⁹ “Kobieta pracuje zawodowo,” esp. 6; “Pytania i odpowiedzi,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1950): 41-42; “Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności,” esp. 13; and “Zadania przodownic społecznych w związku z Narodowym Plebiscytem Pokoju,” esp. 27. On social services for women, see, for example, Bogdan Mieczkowski, *Social Services for Women in Eastern Europe* (Charleston, Ill.: The Association for the Study of the Nationalities [USSR and Eastern Europe], 1982), and Bogdan Mieczkowski, “Social Services for Women and Childcare Facilities in Eastern Europe,” in *Women, the State, and Party*, ed. Wolchik and Meyer, 257-69.

⁹⁰ “Nowe prawo rodzinne,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 6 (1950): 41-48, esp. 44; and Ewa Mędrzycka, “Nowy projekt kodeksu rodzinnego,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (April 1950): 22-26.

⁹¹ “Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności,” 6; “Kobieta pracuje zawodowo,” 9; “Jak organizować 8 marca w kołach Ligi Kobiet,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1952): 29-38; and M[elania] Mroczek and H[elena] Spalona, “Prace i zadania wsi,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 6 (1952): 3-39.

efforts. Agitators subordinated women's issues to questions and goals that the party raised.⁹² During the stalinist period, the party introduced and the League, partly through its agitators, popularized social services, protective legislation, and employment and educational opportunities geared toward women not solely for women's benefit (although many women undoubtedly benefited from them) and the creation of gender equality but for reaching larger party goals and the development of a socialist state.

Excitement, Backwardness, and Disorganization among Agitators

Przodownice społeczne conveyed excitement about socialism and their responsibility for educating women. They reported feeling honored to have been selected for this position based on their political outlook, leadership, respect from other women, and dedication to socialism. Shortly after being chosen, one agitator, Roźniewska, "began with great enthusiasm in enlightening women about the meaning of socialist work discipline in realizing [production] goals."⁹³ Stanisława Makarewicz received "great satisfaction and is motivated to work hard" in this effort. "I am proud," she stated, "to take part in educating women."⁹⁴ During the formal discussion at a national meeting held in September 1949 in Warsaw for *przodownice społeczne*, agitators spoke about the importance, structure, and difficulties of their work, and expressed pride and satisfaction with their active involvement in enlightening women. A villager, Weronika Elertowa, was "delighted ... in my heart," because of the extensive information that she received at the meeting, enough to hold "not one briefing and not three." At the conference, she obtained "enough material for two weeks and more, because I have a lot to say."⁹⁵ After having the opportunity to see firsthand the work of the "government" while attending this convention, Wojnarowska, a petty farmer, showed enthusiasm and conviction about her endeavors in

⁹² In the case of Hungary, in contrast, Goven has argued that even though the organization at times referred "to work as the means of self-realization, or, more often, the way to realize one's equal rights, it gave more emphasis to work as a means of helping one's family, building 'socialism,' and 'defending peace.'" Goven, "Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism," 44.

⁹³ "Zadania przodownic społecznych na odcinku pogłębienia socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy," 35.

⁹⁴ [Irena] N[owakowska], "Praca przodownic społecznych w pow. Oleśnica," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 9 (1951): 18-22, quotation on 22. See also "Jak pracują przodownice społeczne Nowego Miasta," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (November 1953): 33-34, on being honored to be an agitator.

⁹⁵ "Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad."

the class struggle and socialism in general. Her role as a *przodownica społeczna* allowed her to “fight against the exploitation of one person by another,” she stated.⁹⁶

In a regular column in *Poznajmy prawdę*, “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami” (Sharing our experiences), some *przodownice społeczne* expressed feelings of inadequacy in taking on this responsibility. Often not highly educated themselves and with little authority prior to the onset of the new state, these women sometimes exhibited dedication to fulfilling their obligations as well as a fear that their inexperience and lack of education would prevent them from doing so. They acted as both novices in search of guidance from party and League leaders, and experts who disseminated information to the population at large. An agitator from a factory in Łódź, for example, wrote: “I am very proud that the League of Women’s Board, to which I belong, chose me to be a *przodownica społeczna*. This work gives me great satisfaction.” Yet she expressed her fear of not being able to carry out this task successfully. She was afraid that she was a “poor *przodownica społeczna*” and did not know how to carry out this responsibility appropriately.⁹⁷ Another agitator was worried that she was “not a good *przodownica społeczna* because I do not know how to present lectures.” The editors of *Poznajmy prawdę* advised her not to be concerned since agitators were not supposed to give lectures but rather conduct informal discussions with women.⁹⁸ H. Z. also had doubts about her abilities. “I am not yet very smart or educated, there are many things that I do not know, sometimes I cannot even understand what is written in the newspaper.”⁹⁹

Przodownice społeczne from rural areas especially conveyed their lack of preparation for the task and often apologized for their inability to speak articulately. During the national meeting, for example, Gorlicka, a villager, ended her statement with: “I am sorry that my statement was so boring,” while Iwańska wanted “to say a few words, but I am deeply sorry and do not be surprised that I will not

⁹⁶ Ibid. For similar views, see also “Piszemy o swojej pracy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1952): 64-77, esp. 74-75.

⁹⁷ “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3-4 (1949): 44-48, quotation on 45-46. In this regular column, agitators wrote letters about their experiences in the field.

⁹⁸ “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1949): 22-24, quotation on 22.

⁹⁹ “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 6 (1951): 17- 23, quotation on 20.

express them as others. All the women [here] are educated, but I am a rural and ignorant woman.”¹⁰⁰

Although these agitators portrayed themselves as backward in comparison to urban women, they likewise exhibited excitement about the opportunity to express themselves and have a voice under the new system. The socialist state, unlike its predecessor in the interwar period, they claimed, valued their contributions and gave them an active part in its development.

Agitators, ironically, expressed feelings of backwardness at the same time that they were instructed to enlighten “backward” women. Their backwardness, however, differed from other women’s. Some agitators were not well educated and inadequately prepared for their responsibilities, but they were already politically enlightened; whereas their audience was ideologically “backward.” Editors and leaders always encouraged these agitators by responding with an affirmation that agitators completed their work successfully and advised them to continue their efforts. League leaders, then, participated in instilling confidence in agitators, some of whom depicted themselves as “backward,” and sought to create experts out of novices in the process.

League sources did not present only enthusiasm in discussions of agitators. Especially in the later years of this form of propaganda, some sources admitted a lack of commitment and disorganization. They described agitators’ oral propaganda as difficult, disorderly, and marked by some “very serious shortcomings.”¹⁰¹ They indicated that some agitators were poorly trained, were not knowledgeable about their tasks, did not attend meetings and training sessions, did not report back to the League in a systematic manner, and failed to complete their responsibilities as instructed. A group leader in the city of Krosno, for example, reported that following instructional presentations, agitators were unwilling to engage in discussions,¹⁰² while a group leader from Katowice complained that after initial enthusiasm, “something has gone wrong.” Agitators skipped mandatory meetings, resulting in

¹⁰⁰ “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad.”

¹⁰¹ “Projekt instrukcji.” For some other examples of criticism, see “O analizie szeregów i ewidencji przodownic społecznych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1952): 42-45; “Instruktaż i kontrola pracy przodownic społecznych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (December 1952): 28-31; and Irena Nowakowska, “Przodownica społeczna pracuje,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1953): 38-42.

¹⁰² “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3 (1950): 60-61.

numerous cancellations due to small turnouts.¹⁰³ Some agitators did not even fully comprehend either the term “agitator” or the tasks related to it.¹⁰⁴ League leaders blamed not only individual agitators but also the organization for these shortcomings. By 1952, for instance, in numerous provinces the number of agitators increased too slowly while in others it declined. Leaders complained that this situation was largely due to provincial administrations not accomplishing their obligations in choosing enough qualified agitators, in training them properly, and in maintaining contact with the Central Administration. The central and regional administrations, they claimed, had not been taking enough interest in remedying these problems.¹⁰⁵ In other words, too much control had been given to local chapters in accomplishing these tasks, while the center had been negligent in overseeing this work.

Agitators’ expressions of enthusiasm may have been sincerely felt but were also a tactic to encourage other women to become agitators or adopt socialist ideology. League publications were geared toward educating members about socialism, and the inclusion of positive pronouncements served the organization by attempting to instill excitement in members, who then would display that enthusiasm to other women. Agitators also may have “performed” their enthusiasm because this was what League and party leaders expected. Portrayals of inadequacy and depictions of problems possibly were part of the common stalinist-era ritualistic performance of “criticism and self-criticism,” in which one criticized oneself and others in discussions and meetings with the goal of repairing problems within the system.¹⁰⁶ League members were aware of and utilized this ritualistic performance in their own meetings.

Agitators’ indication of enthusiasm, inadequacy, and backwardness, and signs of lack of commitment and disorganization also suggest the possibility of genuine feelings about propaganda work. Some agitators, for example, felt excited about their responsibilities and honored to hold this

¹⁰³ “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 5 (1950): 60.

¹⁰⁴ “Projekt instrukcji.”

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, “Osiem lat ludowej oczyzny”; and “Projekt instrukcji.”

¹⁰⁶ On “criticism and self-criticism,” see Alexei Kojevnikov, “Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948,” *Russian Review* 57, no. 1 (January 1998): 25-52.

position, an assignment that for some was viewed as serious and “a great privilege.”¹⁰⁷ Although Poles were generally less accepting of communism than people in other parts of Eastern Europe and party leaders had to be more cautious about forcing their ideology in Poland,¹⁰⁸ following a devastating war and an increasingly conservative and unstable interwar period, agitators, as well as some other Poles, believed in and benefited from certain aspects of socialism, found hope in and were loyal to the new system, and wanted to take part in rebuilding Poland around a new order that promised a better future and greater opportunities to workers and farmers.¹⁰⁹ Others may have joined the League and in some cases become agitators because they believed that this was a manner in which they could reach out to women and assist them. Still others most likely joined as a means to forward their own goals—membership in the official organization and agitational work allowed them some benefits. Furthermore, those who advanced in social hierarchy, such as League agitators, and saw real benefits from the socialist state were often more loyal to the state.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Zawadecka, “Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet,” 25.

¹⁰⁸ Poles were less accepting of socialism for a variety of reasons, including their wartime experiences with the Soviet Union, forced deportations to Siberia, and lack of assistance in the Warsaw Uprising against Germany. On lower acceptance of communism by Poles, see, for example, Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 3-4. John Connelly examines specifically the lower level of acceptance by professors in Poland in comparison to Czechoslovakia and East Germany. See John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), part 2.

¹⁰⁹ For some examples of women’s enthusiasm about socialism and comparisons to both the interwar and war periods, see numerous personal accounts in Wanda Drozdowska, ed., *Wspomnienia kobiet* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1972); Józef Anioł and Eugeniusz Gajewski, eds., *Moje życie w Polsce Ludowej: Wspomnienia* (n.p.: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1969); Halina Rudnicka and ZGLK, *Kobiety mówią o sobie* (Warsaw: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Oświatowa “Czytelnik,” 1952); and Halina Lipińska, *Mój awans* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1950). Although these sources are all from the communist era and very well may have been a form of propaganda, we cannot deny the possibility that some people did indeed believe in and were loyal to socialism, particularly in the early years. Małgorzata Fidelis has found that rising from poverty in the postwar period marked the experiences of some women workers she interviewed. Małgorzata Fidelis, “Reinventing Gender: Women Industrial Workers and the State in Postwar Poland, 1945-1956” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., in process). Historian Dariusz Jarosz has argued for a movement away from the totalitarian model of Polish stalinist-era history and has maintained that some Poles accepted and benefited from the system. Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm, 1948-1956* (Warsaw: Instytut PAN, 2000), conclusion. See also Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie*, 29, 136 for similar arguments.

¹¹⁰ Both Hanna Świda-Ziemia and Krystyna Kersten also have made these claims. Hanna Świda-Ziemia, *Człowiek wewnętrznie zniewolony: Problemy psychosocjologiczne minionej formacji* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1998), esp. 107-11; Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, esp. 170-71, and Krystyna Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem: Polska 1944-1956* (London: Aneks, 1993), introduction.

Agitators' acknowledgments of their inadequacy to speak in public or fulfill their roles point to genuine feelings of inferiority. Most of these women were not highly educated and were engaging in political activism for the first time. They, not surprisingly, considered themselves unprepared to enter the political arena, a sphere that had traditionally been reserved for educated men, and felt uncomfortable speaking in public, educating other women, and participating in politics.

After initial enthusiasm for their new role as agitators, some women lost interest for a variety of reasons. Especially in the later years, some women probably started to rethink their commitment to the socialist project and state, the League, and propaganda. Their loss of commitment suggests growing disillusionment with the direction into which the state was moving. An unreceptive audience and the general anticommunist climate likewise may have diminished their ability to accomplish their responsibilities. Furthermore, adding political activism to their double burden of work outside the home and family/domesticity was more than they wanted or could commit to.¹¹¹ For any or all of these reasons, agitators may have consciously decided to skip meetings, not report to administrations, and shirk their tasks.

Depictions of disorganization likewise indicate actual problems within this form of propaganda work. Local chapters and administrations did not always strictly adhere to central guidelines. Furthermore, agitational work within the League was in its infancy. It, therefore, is not surprising that the League would encounter some obstacles and organizational difficulties, forcing it constantly to rethink agitators' goals, benefits, and tactics. Socialist states did not function according to

¹¹¹ The focus on women's roles as mothers/wives and workers has led numerous scholars to argue that Eastern European women faced a double burden, or even a triple burden that added women's political and social activism to the mix. The idea of the double or triple burden has been examined by numerous scholars. For some examples, see Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993); Ivan Volgyes and Nancy Volgyes, *The Liberated Female: Life, Work, and Sex in Socialist Hungary* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977); Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Hertfordshire, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); and various essays in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993).

monolithic plans. Rather, inefficiency, disorganization, and constant revisions were common problems that party leaders encountered throughout the region.¹¹²

The Gender of Conversation: Agitators Talking to “Backward” Women

Party leaders recognized the importance of including women in propaganda. They feared that women, particularly peasants and housewives, were more likely than men to ally with class enemies—speculators, capitalists, spies, and kulaks—and therefore weaken the socialist state.¹¹³ The League constructed all women, but especially nonemployed and rural women, as “hesitant and wavering,” easily manipulated by others, not devoted to socialism, and therefore, in need of ideological instruction.¹¹⁴ A prominent League member stated: “We must resist this action . . . with our persistent and systematic enlightening and educational work in order to tilt to our favor hesitant and wavering attitudes of women, especially housewives and farmwomen.”¹¹⁵ In the words of secretary Zawadecka, nonworking women “most often are instilled with . . . political backwardness and that is why they easily can be, and are, taken advantage of by influences of hostile elements.”¹¹⁶ The League

¹¹² See, for example, Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Goldman depicts the disorganization and lack of centralization in the workforce.

¹¹³ A number of scholars have made this point about women in the Soviet Union. Beatrice Farnsworth, for example, has stated that communists viewed peasant women as “a potential source of counterrevolution.” Beatrice Farnsworth, “Village Women Experience the Revolution,” in *Russian Peasant Women*, ed. Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 145-66, quotation on 145. Lynne Viola demonstrates how peasant women used these images of themselves for protest against collectivization in Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. chap. 6. In interwar Soviet Union, women were perceived as “less politically conscious than men and hence more likely to contaminate children.” David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 91. In the case of Eastern Europe, Barbara Einhorn has written that “full-time wives and mothers were denigrated as ‘bourgeois relics.’” Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, 58. A kulak is a negative characterization that communists created to describe wealthy farmers but also used for other supposed “class enemies.”

¹¹⁴ Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, “Wytyczne pracy oświatowej,” 43. For similar ideas for Hungary, see Fodor, “Smiling Women and Fighting Men.”

¹¹⁵ Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, “Wytyczne pracy oświatowej,” 43.

¹¹⁶ Zawadecka, “Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet,” 25.

simultaneously condemned and embraced this gendered construction of women as easily influenced. Agitators, like class enemies, attempted to manipulate women. Women's "hesitant and wavering" attitudes, therefore, were not solely damaging to socialism but also beneficial to propaganda campaigns. Agitators sought to reconfigure this perceived weakness for the benefit of the socialist project.

The League did not limit these characteristics of women to housewives and farmwomen; it also sometimes presented working women (although less frequently) as unenlightened gossipers, whom spies for the capitalist West often approached to obtain information. According to one instructional article, spies knew that "people, and especially women, love to talk." The questions spies presented to women were seemingly "innocent." "The spy asks: how much does your factory produce? How many employees work there? Who is the director? Is it true that soon there will be a new manager in your department? . . . How much do you sell, [and] which articles are purchased most often?" The talkative woman responds to all of these questions and "is pleased that she knows so much about her factory or store where she or someone close to her works." This type of woman was unaware that the person questioning her was a spy, who "will send abroad the information he received from her." She did not think about the fact that "she endangers her country, and therefore herself and her children . . . [and] paves the way for a new war."¹¹⁷ Furthermore, by "submitting to reactionary rumors," women "intensified our difficulties" in creating a better life for everyone.¹¹⁸ The *przodownica społeczna*'s obligation was to inform her listeners about the potential detrimental effect women's talkativeness could have not only on the country but also on their children. The fear of women's tendency to be influenced by class enemies went hand in hand with the gendered construction of women as talkers.

The League also portrayed women as easily persuaded by speculators, who, according to propaganda, claimed that, with another war lurking around the corner, people needed to buy reserves of

¹¹⁷ "Czy fakty te świadczą o sile wroga?" *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3-4 (1949): 4-9, quotations on 6-7. See also Sztachelska's speech at the 1949 national League conference. Sztachelska, "Zadania Ligi Kobiet w walce o pokój," esp. 10. On similar images of working women in the Soviet Union, see Elizabeth A. Wood, "Class and Gender at Loggerheads in the Early Soviet State: Who Should Organize the Female Proletariat and How?" in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 294-310, esp. 295-96.

¹¹⁸ "Wykonaliśmy Plan 3-letni," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3-4 (1949): 9-15, quotation on 14.

foods and other supplies, thereby creating a panic among “unenlightened” women. *Przodownice społeczne* were to convince these women that capitalist speculators were reactionary forces spreading false information and thus hurting the country and its inhabitants. One instructional article maintained that “under the influence of enemy rumors: ‘because we will run out,’ ‘because this is the last transport,’ ‘because a friend knows well that they will be selling it only in limited quantities later,’ ‘because in other places it has not been available for a long time; therefore, it will be unavailable here as well,’ and many, many other rumors, women stand in long lines and buy out everything they can get.” This practice of buying in bulk, in turn, the instructions claimed, created shortages, leading to even greater panic.¹¹⁹ Women were being cast as scapegoats for economic and political problems. There were indeed shortages of food, creating a great burden for women shoppers, but these were hardly caused by women hoarding food under the influence of speculators. Concerned about their families’ survival in a time of hardship and shortages, women did what was necessary to obtain necessities, especially food, for their families.¹²⁰

Not only did the League portray all women as potential gossipers, but talkativeness also manifested itself in agitators’ work. The method that *przodownice społeczne* typically used in their efforts to spread propaganda was oral. In contrast to occasional and planned meetings, agitators were to have constant access to women and inform them on a daily basis.¹²¹ This type of enlightening work was “not to be characterized by delivering lectures or collective talks, but . . . by individual conversation, chit-chat, during which a *przodownica społeczna* explains . . . actual issues, leading to a simultaneous discussion.”¹²² Through these individual visits and chats, *przodownice społeczne* were to discern how their listeners lived, worked, and conducted themselves, and what their major complaints were. Female

¹¹⁹ “Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności,” 23. See also “Do walki z nowym atakiem spekulantów,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1950): 24-25; “Wyjaśniamy trudności gospodarcze,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 9 (1951): 1-19; and “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad.”

¹²⁰ Focusing primarily on the 1970s and the rise of the Solidarity Movement, Padraic Kenney has noted that women turned to issues concerning motherhood, family finances, and practical needs to resist the state, issues that women focused on during the stalinist period as well. See Padraic Kenney, “The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland,” *American Historical Review* 104 (April 1999): 399-425.

¹²¹ Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, “Wytyczne pracy oświatowej,” 43.

¹²² ZGLK, “Instrukcja w sprawie przodownic społecznych.” See also “Kto to jest przodownica społeczna.”

agitators, as women, were instructed to use the same form of activity that women commonly employed in their everyday lives. By using informal chats with women—a form of communication with which women, including female agitators, were already familiar and employing—agitators were supposed to create female bonds with their audience. The purpose of this form of propaganda work was not intended to stop women from talking altogether (although the League often presented women’s tendency to talk as negative) but to redirect that talkativeness. Agitators’ female audience ideally would eventually also employ their tendency to gossip when they became agitators for or advocates of the League and the state.

Female talkativeness is further complicated because agitators and class enemies supposedly utilized similar strategies of approaching and conversing with women individually. Informal individual discussions were important, since class enemies, one member stated, were unlikely to come forward at large gatherings. They spread their propaganda to women personally.¹²³ Talking, then, was viewed as harmful to socialism not only because women were prone to reveal information, but also because people whom the party viewed as hostile supposedly used conversation as a method of spreading information as well. The League presented talkativeness as a characteristic that worked both to damage (through women’s talkativeness and class enemies’ use of spreading rumors) and assist the state (through women’s talkativeness with agitators and agitators’ use of talking).

Working individually and sometimes in small groups, *przodownice społeczne* were to take advantage of all opportunities to educate their audience by approaching and conversing with women in a variety of locations. Places they were advised to hit included stores, health clinics, post offices, theaters, cafeterias, and public transportation, areas in which women often gathered. Because they worked regularly among female passengers, customers, and patients, conductors on trams and buses, store clerks, and health care workers were especially desirable for this task.¹²⁴ Agitators operating in stores, for example, were instructed to explain to customers why certain products, such as oil and

¹²³ Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, “Wytyczne pracy oświatowej,” 43.

¹²⁴ For some examples, see “Sprawozdanie: Praca przodownic społecznych na terenie Łodzi”; “Sprawozdanie Wydziału Kobiecego KW za czas od 10.9. do 1.12.49.,” 1949, File “KC PZPR Wydział Kobięcy – KW Warszawa,” sygn. 237/XV-24, AAN; “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad”; and Nowakowska, “Przodownica społeczna pracuje.”

meats, were unavailable and why others, such as flour and sugar, filled store shelves, often blaming speculators and low productivity for shortages. In theaters, they were to address the importance of watching Soviet films; they were advised to inform viewers individually that these films were educational, while those produced in capitalist countries lacked serious substance.¹²⁵ Agitators from cities frequently were directed to travel to rural areas to inform farmwomen, often in their homes, about the benefits they would garner from socialism, encourage them to participate in the harvest, and promote agricultural collectivization.¹²⁶

Agitators were to bring the public political sphere into the private homes of women through the use of personal conversation. In homes, in apartment buildings, on the street, and in the local community, *przodownice społeczne* were to “enlighten” their “politically backward” neighbors and recruit them into the League by chatting on a personal level. They were even advised to go from door to door to converse individually with nonworking women.¹²⁷ Personal acquaintance was to ease their agitation work. Coworkers, friends, family, and neighbors were more likely to listen to agitators than strangers.¹²⁸ This form of oral individual agitation in residential areas was predominantly reserved for

¹²⁵ See, for example, “Sprawozdanie: Praca przodownic społecznych na terenie Łodzi.”

¹²⁶ For some examples, see “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad”; “Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności”; Zofia Gawrońska-Wasilkowska, “Zadania przodownic społecznych Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (November 1949): 14-26, esp. 19; Mroczek and Spalona, “Prace i zadania wsi”; “Socjalistyczna przebudowa wsi,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3-4 (1949): 25-33; “W walce o pomyślne siewy wiosenne,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1950): 7-15; “Co daje spółdzielczość produkcyjna kobiecie wiejskiej,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3 (1950): 25-39; “Odpowiedzi na pytania,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1949): 28-29; “Okólnik Nr. 12: O akcji żniwnej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (June 1950): 31-32; “Okólnik Nr. 15: Dot. Jesiennej akcji siewnej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 13 (July-August 1950): 34-35; and “Wytyczne narady aktywu Ligi Kobiet i ZSch,” *Nasza praca*, no. 16 (October 1950): 26-34.

¹²⁷ Nowakowska, “Przodownica społeczna pracuje,” 39; “Sprawozdanie: Praca przodownic społecznych na terenie Łodzi”; and Sobierajska, “Wytyczne pracy Wydziału Kulturalno-Oświatowego Ligi Kobiet.” Women activists in the Soviet Union during the revolutionary period also worked in neighborhoods. See Wood, *Baba and the Comrade*, 71. In his study on thought control in the Soviet Union, Conquest likewise describes these chats as a form of agitation. In addition to the home and places of work, agitation was to take place “in parks, stadium, *kolkhoz* markets, shops, and other places where rumours are spread.” See Conquest, *Politics of Ideas*, 114-15.

¹²⁸ “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad”; and “Kto to jest przodownica społeczna.” Members of the Hungarian women’s group, according to Goven’s study, also entered the “private” home. Although Goven does not directly state that these women were agitators, their method of spreading propaganda resembles the home visits of *przodownice społeczne*. The organization’s “ideological-education work,” she has argued, “was carried on house to house, face to face; ‘family visits’ figured prominently in its

women, since men were expected to encounter propaganda in public workplaces. Agitators' efforts complicated and blurred the divide between private and public by bringing politics directly into the home.

In addition to informal chats, agitators also spontaneously were to approach small groups in town squares, on trains, and on city streets, and to enter already ongoing conversations. Whenever they saw the opportunity, they were to plant themselves among women and strike up conversations or interrupt discussions that were moving in the “wrong” direction. A report from the Kraków provincial administration described a situation that the vice president wandered upon. “Walking through the town square [she] noticed three somewhat large groups of women who were engaged in a lively discussion, and within each group was one woman [*przodownica społeczna*], who explained warmly . . . why the school year [was] not commencing with an official church service.”¹²⁹ In a report from a Warsaw chapter, a *przodownica społeczna* overheard a conversation among workers while walking down a street. The workers argued that a local furniture store made worthless pieces, “using wet wood,” and placed the blame on work competition. She “interrupted the discussion and explained, that that was not true, and that we currently need lots of furniture. . . . We should only thank work competition for increasingly having more furniture.”¹³⁰ Another agitator, Wojnarowska, recounted two incidences at the national agitators' conference. While traveling to a village, she overheard someone saying: “we don't have shoes and there is mud on our roads.” She pointed out how to solve the problem by responding: “Listen, drain the water from the ground, level the roads, and in this manner you will contribute to the rebuilding of Polish cities and appearance of the Polish village.”¹³¹ In another incident, on a train ride, a discussion about miracles started to brew among about thirty passengers. Wojnarowska explained that “there are no miracles, that during the horrors of war and when millions of people perished in Auschwitz and Majdanek, there were no miracles. Even more so, when we are

repertoire” even during evenings and weekends. Goven, “Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism,” 86.

¹²⁹ “Sprawozdanie: W działalności Wydziału Kobięcego KW PZPR w Krakowie za m-c sierpień 49 r.,” 5 September 1949, File “KC PZPR Wydział Kobięcy – KW Kraków,” sygn. 237/XV-15, AAN.

¹³⁰ “Sprawozdanie Wydziału Kobięcego KW za czas od 10.9. do 1.12.49.”

¹³¹ “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad.”

rebuilding, there can be no miracles.” Although her listeners initially called her a “communist, a crazed woman,” they eventually “admitted that [she] was in the right.”¹³² In this incident, her talk was self-evidently communist to the audience. By linking the terms “communist” and “crazed,” they demonstrated their negative opinions of communism.

In these spontaneous and informal small group discussions, *przodownice społeczne* advocated party policy and communist ideology to often, yet as the last case shows not always, unsuspecting audiences. They entered or started conversations casually usually without overtly revealing their agenda of educating their listeners about the benefits of the new system and the importance of women’s participation in it. The recounting of these incidences in League publications served as a way to instruct agitators on how to conduct their work.

Responses to Agitators from Audiences

Responses and reactions from listeners to the League’s and *przodownice społeczne*’s propaganda campaigns varied. Most typically and not surprisingly, the League presented complainants and listeners as easily convinced and appeased by agitators’ “exemplary” work. In some cases, however, publications disclose hints of opposition, complaints, and disinterest from the female audience. Listeners, and even other League members, occasionally ignored, interrupted, or debated with agitators. An employee from a shoe factory, Serwińska, for example, maintained that she was well liked by her co-workers until they discovered that she was an agitator and frequently wrote to the newspaper. Their “hatred” of her did not, however, stop her from her activism.¹³³ Even some members exhibited dissatisfaction. During a meeting in Warsaw, they began to complain about food shortages and long lines. One member used arguments of class enemies and low agricultural production in her explanation of these shortages to which another member replied, ““you stated everything very nicely,

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

but that is not going to give me meat for my children. Talking is easy.”¹³⁴ This member directly criticized the method of “talking”; it was, as she stated, easy to talk but difficult to actually put those words into action.

Although agitators were instructed to chat with their listeners, female audiences did not always want to engage in conversations. Maria Cyplińska from Łódź, for instance, expressed her frustration with “backwardness” among many women. In large factories, she explained, “when we discuss excommunication, women leave through windows, they do not want to listen to this topic.”¹³⁵ “Of course,” one article claimed, “neighbors did not always listen with interest.” To end a conversation, “they frequently left, explaining that they had important tasks to accomplish.”¹³⁶ The League acknowledged that female neighbors and women workers sometimes deliberately refused to talk or even to listen. Although the League constructed women as talkative, women decided with whom and about what they wanted to talk. As these cases indicate, they sometimes refused outright to chat with agitators. Talking (and not talking), then, was a tactic that some of the female audience utilized for their own benefit.

Leaving through windows, stating that they had other responsibilities, not associating with agitators, or even referring to an agitator as “crazed” are all plausible reactions to propaganda campaigns during the stalinist period. Not surprisingly some women did not accept and were unwilling to be influenced by agitators’ arguments or propaganda in general. The inclusion of such responses in League bulletins and at the national conference, however, was not solely a simple recounting of these reactions; it also served the League’s propaganda efforts. Through the publication and presentation of these responses, agitators (especially newly chosen agitators) gained information about the types of

¹³⁴ “Dzielimy się doświadczeniami,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 9 (1951): 20-28, quotation on 22. Although not specifically describing the work of agitators, Stanisława Komarzyca, a village woman, relayed the resistance surrounding organizing rural women in her memoir. See Stanisława Komarzyca, “Brzemie kobiety wiejskiej,” in *Moje życie w Polsce Ludowej: Wspomnienia*, ed. Józef Anioł and Eugeniusz Gajewski (n.p.: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1969), 97-113.

¹³⁵ “Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad.” In June 1949, Pope Pius XII excommunicated Catholics who belonged to or worked with the Communist Party. See Stanisław Markiewicz, *Państwo i kościół w Polsce Ludowej* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1981), 80-81; and Antoni Dudek, *Państwo i kościół w Polsce, 1945-1970* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo PiT, 1995), 17.

¹³⁶ N[owakowska], “Praca przodownic społecznych w pow. Oleśnica,” 21. Eventually, these neighbors started to listen, she maintained, and even approached agitators to get more information.

reactions that they were likely to encounter in the field. By demonstrating that the audience might criticize or ignore agitators' work, the League may have attempted to prepare and improve agitators' strategies. Relaying these incidents showed to agitators that continued and deliberate agitation was indeed necessary to deal with complaints and negative responses. Only through their concerted efforts, they were informed, would their female audience eventually support and understand them, the League, and the socialist state.

What Happened to *Przodownice Społeczne*?

At first glance, it appears that the gradual decline of League agitators was a direct result of the destalinization process (or the thaw) following Stalin's death in March 1953.¹³⁷ Poland along with Eastern Europe in general experienced some, although limited, relaxation, and stalinist terror and propaganda slowly subsided. Party leaders may have no longer seen political agitation among women as crucial to party goals, especially since leaders, the media, and male workers increasingly encouraged women to take on traditional feminine roles as wives and mothers and less so roles as workers and political activists. Labor shortages of the stalinist period turned to growing levels of unemployment, especially for women, as an influx of Poles from the countryside moved to cities, industrialization campaigns waned, and economic reforms with an emphasis on light industry and the consumer sector developed. In the process of destalinization, women's labor participation, especially in heavy industry, and gender equality were viewed as symbols of the discredited stalinist system.¹³⁸ Female agitators, as

¹³⁷ Some scholars recognize a distinct phase of destalinization (1953 to 1956). See especially Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), esp. chaps. 8-11; and Thomas W. Simons, Jr., *Eastern Europe in the Postwar World*, 2d. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), chap. 5. Some changes did occur within the League during this phase, but greater transformations emerged in 1955-1956, during which the League moved to what members termed "practical activism," focusing on the everyday needs of women and motherhood.

¹³⁸ On the party's new focus on female reproduction over their participation in the workforce, see Malgorzata Fidelis, "Equality through Protection: The Politics of Women's Employment in Postwar Poland, 1945-1956," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 2 (summer 2004): 301-24, esp. 318-22, and Malgorzata Fidelis, "'New Occupations' and Traditional Hierarchies: The Case of Women Coalminers in Postwar Poland, 1951-1957" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Toronto, November 2003). The League turned to an emphasis on

outspoken participants in politics, as well as their messages geared to create economically and politically active women, did not fit into this traditional image of womanhood. Terminating their work, hence, appears as an unsurprising consequence of the general political climate during this phase of Eastern European history.

However, agitators' work significantly decreased in importance by the end of 1952, as evidenced by the dwindling numbers of articles focusing on their efforts and termination of *Poznajmy prawdę*, agitators' primary source of on-the-job training, about five months prior to Stalin's death and about one full year before the formal destalinization process began in Poland in October 1953.¹³⁹ The stalinist period was not static; in fact, significant changes commenced prior to the more visible process of destalinization. Unlike other notable changes within the organization, the League's internal bulletins did not disclose the reasons for or even mention the phasing out of this propaganda method. Various party documents, however, reveal that the dissolution of agitators' work was directly related to the Communist Party's Central Committee's decision to transform "work among women" in late 1952 through mid-1953. By the latter half of 1953, when Poland moved toward relaxation, the decline of agitators' work was already underway and the decision to dissolve this propaganda method, along with the decision to transform "work among women," had already been made.¹⁴⁰

In September 1952, at approximately the same time that the agitators' bulletin ceased publication, party officials discussed the dissolution of Women's Divisions, party branches that dealt specifically with women's issues and incorporated the League. At the same time, the Central Committee chose to make changes within the League by dissolving workplace chapters and focusing on building up chapters in residential and rural areas, locations where the organization to date had been weak. These transformations did not occur overnight; the Central Committee passed ongoing

maternity/reproduction in the later stages of destalinization (in 1955) when it participated in the international conference for mothers and later held a national conference for mothers.

¹³⁹ Destalinization began later in Poland than most other parts of Eastern Europe, and the changes were minor, as compared to other countries. Brzezinski, *Soviet Bloc*, 165-66.

¹⁴⁰ Agitators were mentioned occasionally following late 1952, but for the most part their work was largely dissolved at that time. The last article that I found in *Nasza praca* that mentioned agitators was published in early 1955. See "O ciekawych formach pracy kulturalno-oświatowej organizacji stalinogrodzkiej," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1955): 20-21.

resolutions into mid-1953. Although party documents do not directly address the abolition of agitators' work, the timing of these changes was not coincidental.

The Central Committee provided a variety of reasons for these transitions. Officials were dissatisfied with women's level of political awareness and their minimal "participation in realizing general state assignments."¹⁴¹ Women's Divisions hindered rather than helped "work among women" by focusing on narrow women's issues and not on general party goals, the Committee claimed.¹⁴² In addition, national, regional, and local party committees left all "work among women" to women activists rather than including it into their own initiatives. The Central Committee directed these lower-level party committees to treat women's issues as central and important rather than leaving them on the periphery.¹⁴³ With the dissolution of the Divisions, women's issues were to be incorporated into the party as a whole, thereby giving the party greater control over "work among women." The party's Organizational Department was to take over this work, and the League's secretary who oversaw propaganda was to answer directly to this Department. These documents suggest that the Women's Divisions were both too effective in emphasizing women's issues and not effective enough in advocating general party goals. Women's Divisions may have become too independent by straying away from socialist ideology and therefore may have become potentially harmful for the party.

The Committee also contended that this decision was made to reflect changes in other communist bloc countries, where either Women's Divisions or the women's organization had been

¹⁴¹ "Notatka Wydziału Kobiecego KC PZPR w sprawie zmiany kierownictwa Partii pracą wśród kobiet," 29 September 1952, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety," sygn. 237/XV-3, AAN. "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii pracą wśród kobiet," 9 January 1953, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiety," sygn. 237/XV-8, AAN uses the same wording.

¹⁴² "Notatka Wydziału Kobiecego"; "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii"; and "Uchwała: O zmianie form partyjnego kierownictwa praca wśród kobiet," 26 January 1953, File "KC PZPR Wydział Propagandy i Agitacji," sygn. 237/VIII-76, AAN. As early as 1950, the Central Committee made these criticisms of the Divisions and the League. KC PZPR, *W sprawie pracy wśród kobiet: Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR* (Warsaw: KC PZPR, 1950), 12.

¹⁴³ "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii"; "Notatka Wydziału Kobiecego"; KC PZPR, *W sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet: Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR* (Warsaw: KC PZPR, July 1953), File "Kobiety w Polsce Ludowej," sygn. I 1d., DZS, BN; "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet," June 1953, File "KC PZPR Wydział Propagandy i Agitacji," sygn. 237/VIII-76, AAN; and "Uchwała: O zmianie form partyjnego kierownictwa."

dissolved, but the two no longer functioned alongside one another.¹⁴⁴ In Czechoslovakia, women's commissions, which were part of the Communist Party, were dissolved in 1950, a couple of years earlier than in Poland. The reasons provided for their dissolution were twofold. "Women members of the party had reached such a high degree of political maturity that they no longer needed a special organizational form within the party and by the statement that work among non-communist women was of such importance that it was better considered a party-wide responsibility."¹⁴⁵ The entire women's organization was abolished in 1952 and an eighty- to one hundred-member Committee of Women on the national level and women's commissions on the local level were reinstated to take over women's issues. The Union of Czechoslovak Women was characterized as superfluous and no longer necessary since women were already engaged in public life and the labor force and the "woman question" had been answered. Furthermore, "work among women" by the organization supposedly had been successful and women no longer needed this form of political education.¹⁴⁶ A discussion about dissolving the official Hungarian women's organization also took place around this time, but the organization was not disbanded. In 1951, however, workplace chapters were dissolved.¹⁴⁷ Situated in the context of the stalinist era in Eastern Europe, then, the changes that took place in Poland were not an anomaly, suggesting that Soviet leaders may have perceived a problem within "work among women" in the entire region, as they had in the 1930s in the Soviet Union, leading to the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel*.

The party's Central Committee likewise promoted changes for the League. Party officials directed the organization to bring in more party women into its ranks, particularly on leadership levels, and promoted greater party assistance (i.e., control) for the League, especially in ideological-political work.¹⁴⁸ The more significant transformation took place in the location of activism. The organization

¹⁴⁴ "Notatka Wydziału Kobiecego."

¹⁴⁵ Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," 315, n. 75.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 322. See also Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women?*, 100-102.

¹⁴⁷ Joanna Goven, personal correspondence with author, February 2001.

¹⁴⁸ "Notatka Wydziału Kobiecego"; "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii"; "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet"; and "Uchwała: O zmianie form partyjnego kierownictwa."

was to dissolve its workplace chapters and function only in residential areas among housewives and working women and in rural areas among peasant women.¹⁴⁹ The League, Central Committee documents indicated, had not accomplished enough particularly among housewives and rural women, women that were often depicted as ideologically “backward.”¹⁵⁰

With the movement into residential locations, all League members, rather than primarily agitators, were directed to participate in propaganda among women.¹⁵¹ The Central Committee asserted that “until now the League of Women’s activism alongside inadequacy in systematically conducting educational work, especially in the most backward circles, as well as outdated organizational forms and unsuitable arrangement of [members’] energy” had impeded “mass political work among women.”¹⁵² Although the Committee does not directly name agitators as the culprit, it does suggest that the League conducted agitators’ work inadequately and that this form of activism was outdated and no longer suitable for the state’s needs. By 1952, criticisms of agitational work had become more prominent. In some locations, the pace of training agitators decreased significantly and recruiting became increasingly difficult, while in other areas, the number of agitators was declining rapidly, a situation that the League wished to correct.¹⁵³ Although these criticisms may have been part of “criticism and self-criticism,” it is important to note that these complaints were rising and consequently suggest a genuine expression of concern. It was increasingly acknowledged that agitators were not accomplishing what the organization and party had desired. The Central Committee’s criticisms, therefore, may not be farfetched.

Furthermore, the Central Committee argued that to improve political awareness among women, incorporate more women into “productive work in industry and agriculture,” bring more

¹⁴⁹ “Notatka Wydziału Kobięcego.” In workplaces, the Committee stated that trade unions, like the party, largely neglected women’s issues. With these changes, unions were charged with taking over work among working women in places of employment. See also “Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii.”

¹⁵⁰ “Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet.”

¹⁵¹ Ibid.; and “Uchwała: O zmianie form partyjnego kierownictwa.”

¹⁵² “Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet.”

¹⁵³ See, for example, “Osiem lat ludowej ojczyzny.”

“women into political and social life, and educate them in the spirit of fervent patriotism and devotion to the building of socialism, . . . party organizations, people’s authorities, and social organizations [including the League,]” must consider “work among women as an inseparable component of their everyday activism.”¹⁵⁴ In this statement, party leaders implied that propaganda work, given its importance to the state, should not be left to a small component of League activism—to agitators—but should instead become a central component of the organization’s work. Enlightening “backward” women became too significant a task to be left to such a small (and disorganized) cohort of League members. Party leaders by no means intended to abolish propaganda work within the League. Instead they sought to redirect that work to the League at large; thereby making it even a more central component of women’s activism.

Transforming “work among women” in 1952 and 1953 had multiple characteristics—dissolving Women’s Divisions was the central transformation, but alongside their eradication came changes within the League as well. The party’s Central Committee made these decisions from above. Dissatisfaction with propaganda “work among women” was the crucial link among all of the changes. Women’s Divisions were focusing too narrowly on women’s issues, party committees were ignoring women’s issues, and the League, particularly its agitators, was unsuccessful in spreading propaganda among nonworking women. To remedy these shortcomings, party leaders revamped the entire system of how women worked among women.

Conclusion

This chapter, more than other chapters, demonstrates how the League did indeed work for the benefit of the state by popularizing the referendum and elections, by helping to create one mass women’s organization, and by conducting “work among women,” particularly through its trained agitators. The League was a means through which party leaders attempted to reach the masses of supposedly “backward,” politically unenlightened, talkative, and dangerous women. Leaders perceived women as important constituents who needed to be shaped into loyal and informed citizens of the socialist state. As women, League members were viewed as a suitable avenue to reach women and to

mold them into productive workers and enlightened citizens. Often using gendered rhetoric, commonly linked to women's maternal role, and gendered tactics, particularly the use of talking, members attempted to instill socialist ideology in other women.

Under the direction of the League and party, agitators carved out a female space within a political sphere that previously had been gendered male. These mostly average and uneducated women participated in state politics for the first time. In addition, they sought to create a space for all women by encouraging them to enter the political and economic spheres as active citizens. Although the League and party developed this form of activism, the decision to take on this work was made by individual women for reasons of their own (e.g., honor, possible benefits, helping women, helping the state further its goals, or a belief in socialism). In the process, members, and especially agitators, emerge as central actors who for reasons of their own chose to participate in propaganda campaigns.

Propaganda campaigns continued throughout the communist period, with some more explicit than others, and the League continued to advocate political-ideological education of women. As the following chapter shows, these campaigns often included changing discourse and actions related to women's double burden of motherhood and employment. Although the focus on the double burden was connected to propaganda, League members simultaneously sought to assist women in their everyday lives as well as the state in meeting its goals.

¹⁵⁴ "Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet."

CHAPTER 3

“TIME FOR EVERYTHING”: WOMEN AS WORKERS AND MOTHERS

You can find time for everything. You just have to know how to organize your time. I believe that you can and must combine social activism with employment and raising children.¹

Zofia Krajewska—a member of a League’s Łódź district administration, leader of her village’s Circle of Rural Housewives, mother of six, and farmer on a collective farm—spoke these words at a regional League plenary session in 1956. Some of the audience doubted that in reality women could combine these responsibilities successfully. They believed that “Krajewska is theorizing,” and they wanted “to see how she reconcile[d] all of this herself.”² To prove that women could handle work outside the home, motherhood and household responsibilities, and social or political activism, *Nasza praca* representatives visited Krajewska unexpectedly and confirmed that she was not theorizing. In fact, she was “one of thousands of competent women who bring together characteristics of the self-sacrificing social activist, reliable worker, intelligent mother, and good housewife.”³ Women like Krajewska, the representatives concluded, “work in cities and villages throughout the entire country on an equal basis with men. They are loving mothers and intelligent educators. They [are] average women, competent and full of enthusiasm, conscious citizens of our country, who can find time for everything.”⁴

The ideal woman in communist Eastern Europe, as both Krajewska and the League asserted, was supposed to fulfill three roles: waged worker, mother/domestic figure, and political or social

¹ “Na wszystko można znaleźć czas,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1956): 8-9, quotation on 8.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 9.

activist.⁵ From its origins, the League (and party authorities) advocated women's participation in production, in bearing and raising children as well as responsibility in running the household, and in various party committees and organizations, such as the League. Krajewska was an example of the ideal woman; she fulfilled the triple burden by being a mother, working on a collective farm, and actively participating in party and women's groups. League members, however, persistently revealed women's difficulties in reconciling these responsibilities and stressed the need to lessen women's burdens, especially through such initiatives as expansion of childcare facilities, extension of protective employment legislation, and promotion of partnership within families.

In this chapter, I examine the multilayered and changing discourse that members used, as well as some of the programs and activism that the organization initiated, in addressing two of Polish women's burdens: motherhood and employment outside the home.⁶ Although the League presented

⁵ On the triple burden, see, for example, Dimitrina Petrova, "The Winding Road to Emancipation in Bulgaria," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 22-29; Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993), 32; and Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 6.

⁶ Numerous scholars of Eastern European and Soviet women have explored women's double burden as workers and mothers, as well as the difficulties in combining production and reproduction, both under communism and in the postcommunist period. No study, however, has examined an official women's organization's depictions of the double burden. Although the use of "double burden" implies that women in other settings did not live the double burden, often overlooks women's other responsibilities, and simplifies women's roles, I use the term because League members themselves expressed ideas of women's double and sometimes triple burden. For some examples on the double burden in the communist context, see Barbara Łobodzińska, "The Family and Working Women during and after Socialist Industrialization and Ideology," in *Family, Women, and Employment in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Barbara Łobodzińska (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 3-46; Valentina Bodorova and Richard Anker, eds., *Working Women in Socialist Countries: The Fertility Connection* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1985); Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Chris Corrin, ed., *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1992); Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*; Ivan Volgyes and Nancy Volgyes, *The Liberated Female: Life, Work, and Sex in Socialist Hungary* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977); Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Hertfordshire, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); and Greta Bucher, "Struggling to Survive: Soviet Women in the Postwar Years," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 1 (spring 2000): 137-59. Throughout the communist period, numerous sociological studies also examined the issue of combining maternity/family and work. See, for example, Jerzy Piotrowski, *Praca zawodowa kobiety a rodzina: Z prac Instytutu Gospodarstwa Społecznego* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1963); Magdalena Sokółowska, ed., *Kobieta współczesna: Z badań socjologów, lekarzy, ekonomistów, pedagogów i psychologów* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1966); Stefania Dzięcielska-Machnikowska, ed., *Kobieta w rozwijającym się społeczeństwie socjalistycznym* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1975); Krystyna Knychala, *Zatrudnienie kobiet w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1955-1974* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978); Adam Kurzynowski, *Aktywizacja zawodowa kobiet zamężnych w*

women as having the third burden of social and political activism (which included participation in the organization), the major and persistent roles advocated for women in general throughout Eastern Europe were motherhood and work. Consequently, this chapter focuses on women's reproductive and productive responsibilities only.

Under socialism, women were supposed to be emancipated through their engagement in productive labor and their freedom from domestic responsibilities. Party policies throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union encouraged women to enter economic production, often for the first time. Initially, following socialist ideology, leaders planned to alleviate women's domestic burdens by providing numerous state-run services to enable women to focus on production.⁷ In reality, the private family, and women more specifically, continued to hold ultimate responsibility for household affairs and child rearing. As historian David Hoffmann has argued, by the 1930s even "the country that had embarked upon the great socialist experiment [the Soviet Union] reverted to a very traditional family model and an essentialized notion of women's 'natural role' as mothers."⁸ While women became important contributors to production, their responsibilities within the household were not alleviated or redefined.

League members' discourse and actions regarding women's roles as mothers and workers fluctuated during the communist era. The ongoing tensions they presented symbolize the overall persistent confusion over gender roles within socialism. Like socialism more generally, members consistently promoted a combination of working and mothering, even though one role sometimes

Polsce Ludowej: Geneza—czynniki rozwoju—perspektywy (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1979); and Danuta Graniewska, *Awans zawodowy kobiet a fazy życia rodzinnego* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1985).

⁷ On social services, see Bogdan Mieczkowski, *Social Services for Women in Eastern Europe* (Charleston, Ill.: The Association for the Study of Nationalities [USSR and Eastern Europe], 1982).

⁸ David L. Hoffmann, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (fall 2000): 35-54, quotation on 35. This traditional family, however, was not supposed to work on behalf of individual family members but instead for the state's benefit through instilling socialist values in families. This pro-family focus was visible throughout Europe, Hoffmann has claimed, but in contrast to Western Europe, in the Soviet context the state continued to control the family. As he has stated, "while the family was a traditional institution, Soviet policy should not be confused with a return to the traditional family." David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 109. On a renewed focus on the family, see also Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

overshadowed the other, and presented the two as natural and universal. Although their emphasis shifted from motherhood to work or to a balanced combination of both, members rarely advocated getting rid of one of women's responsibilities and only occasionally promoted men's greater contribution within the household.⁹ In the immediate postwar period, the League's endeavors focused on assisting women as mothers and workers. Especially under stalinism, members stressed women's work responsibilities in developing socialism and building up industrialization over their duties as mothers. They discussed motherhood predominantly in propagandistic terms. Following stalinism and into the 1960s, members emphasized "practical activism," which advocated greater balance in women's responsibilities. Assisting working mothers became a focal point. From the mid-1960s through the early 1980s, motherhood, often laden with propaganda, dominated members' discussions. Finally, in the midst of economic and political crises in the 1980s, the organization paid significant attention to women as workers, although motherhood continued to be important. The League's shifting emphasis depended on a number of factors, including the direction that the party as well as the League and its members were taking.¹⁰

This chapter examines why and how the League and its members altered images as well as assistance of women. They struggled to define women's identities and interests in the context of state

⁹ Joanna Goven has stated that in Hungary working men were viewed as "fulfilling their greatest calling by working. . . . Women now had the right (and obligation) to engage in 'productive work' as well—but they must not make the mistake of losing themselves in the muscular, productionist, heroic (male) proletarian. . . . Fatherhood was not incorporated into the masculine ideal in the way that motherhood was incorporated into the feminine: it was production, not reproduction, that continued to define masculinity as it was publicly celebrated." Joanna Goven, "Gender and Modernism in a Stalinist State," *Social Politics* (spring 2002): 3-28, quotation on 9. This was also true in the case of Poland.

¹⁰ In her study of women's periodicals, Zofia Sokół has argued that "the model of women and the family model was dependent on the country's political and economic situation." When unemployment was on the rise women's magazines reminded women of their "holy maternal mission," and when they were needed in production, women were called to fulfill their "responsibility of work for the good of the socialist Fatherland." Zofia Sokół, "Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny na łamach prasy kobiecej (1945-1990)," in *Polskie oblicza feminizmu: Materiały z konferencji "Polskie oblicza feminizmu" Uniwersytet Warszawski 8 marca 1999 roku*, ed. Weronika Chańska and Danuta Ulicka (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki, Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2000), 66-85, quotation on 66. The League sometimes followed the same trajectory and sometimes deviated from it. On the connection between party needs and the dominant image of women as workers or mothers, see also Jadwiga Florczak-Bywalec, "Sytuacja kobiet na rynku pracy," in *Kobieta w rozwijającym się społeczeństwie socjalistycznym*, 23-36; Zofia Dach, *Praca zawodowa kobiet w Polsce: W latach 1950-1972 i jej aspekty ekonomiczno-społeczne* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1976), 54; Knychala, *Zatrudnienie kobiet w Polsce Ludowej*, 17; Danuta Markowska, "Rola kobiety w polskiej rodzinie," in *Kobiety polskie*, ed. Elżbieta Konecka (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), 184-224; and Renata Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka: Kobieta w życiu publicznym w Polsce* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Socjologii, 1990), 82-85.

policies alongside actual concerns and economic realities. Although this chapter largely examines discourse, activism also emerges. The organization seldom initiated these changes in discourse and action but rather followed what the party deemed acceptable or what Poles more generally advocated, yet we cannot deny the possibility that in the process members likewise attempted to assist women in combining their roles, especially during two critical moments of Polish history—1956 and 1981—when the League, more than at any other time, emphasized the contradictions embedded in women’s double burden. The League assisted the state by promoting the party line on women’s responsibilities but at the same time it aided women by advocating and implementing policies and programs that would relieve some of those responsibilities. In some instances, clearly the League’s main agenda was to promote party policy, but in others, the line between assisting the state and assisting women is fuzzy, indicating that both approaches functioned simultaneously.

Helping Women as Mothers and Workers, 1945 to 1948

In the immediate postwar era, 1945 to approximately 1948, League activism centered on philanthropic endeavors that stressed both women’s maternal and work responsibilities. Providing social welfare assistance for mothers and their children along with offering work training programs for women, many of whom were widowed by the war, were the organization’s central initiatives. The group displayed limited political and propaganda overtones, which dominated the League in later years, and instead focused on developing programs to help women.¹¹

To create some semblance of normality following the devastating war and in the middle of an ongoing civil war that was sweeping the country, the organization exhibited a special maternal responsibility in protecting women and children by developing programs, activities, and institutions to assist women in raising their children during times of hardship.¹² It portrayed mothers as nurturers and

¹¹ This is not to say that propaganda did not exist within the League. In fact, from its origins, the organization was linked to the political environment and promoted leftist politics. (See chapter 1 on its origins.) However, the degree of this propaganda was significantly less pronounced than during the stalinist period.

¹² SOLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Głównego Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet za pierwsze półrocze 1947 r.* (Warsaw: ZG SOLK, 1947), 24, File “Liga Kobiet, 1945-1950,” sygn. I 3b, Dokumenty Życia Społecznego, Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw (hereafter DZS, BN); “Deklaracja

caregivers and as in need of being nurtured and taken care of. Organizational goals focused predominantly on helping single mothers and children who had lost their husbands and fathers in the war. Members operated *izby dworcowe* (railroad station accommodations) for mothers and their children who traveled across the country in search of loved ones or job opportunities, particularly in the former German lands in the western part of Poland.¹³ In these *izby*, women and children could wash themselves, eat a meal, and receive some instruction on health, hygiene, and work.¹⁴ The organization also created homes specifically for single mothers and their children as well as for orphaned children.¹⁵ Some members in Łódź “adopted” children orphaned by the war who lacked “a familial home and that heartfelt warmth only a woman-mother could provide for a child.” League mothers brought these children to their homes for holidays and raised them into “competent citizens of Poland.”¹⁶ Many members called for or participated in building new childcare and preschool facilities, summer camps, play yards in cities, and special holiday celebrations for children. And, they continuously stressed the need to nourish children adequately, especially by providing them wholesome milk, and the need to

ideowa Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet,” [1946 to 1948], File “Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie Wydział Kobiety,” sygn. PPR Kr 347, Archiwum Państwowy w Krakowie, Kraków (hereafter APK); Irena Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet: Drukowane na prawach rękopisu* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1947), 7; “Opieka społeczna i opieka nad matką i dzieckiem,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 5-6 (1 June 1946): 18-19; “Żłobki, przedszkola, szwalnie,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 9 (15 July 1946): 14-15; “Krótki zarys założenia Ligi Kobiet na terenie woj. Krakowskiego,” 8 March 1965, 4-5, File “Historia Ligi Kobiet,” in personal possession of Barbara K.; and ZWLK Łódź, *25 lat Ligi Kobiet: 25 lat działalności Ligi Kobiet województwa Łódzkiego, 1945-1970* (Łódź: WDL, 1970), 20, File “Liga Kobiet, 1968,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN.

¹³ Following World War II, Poland lost land to the Soviet Union in the East and acquired land from Germany in the West. As many Germans left this region (either voluntarily or by force), new opportunities opened up for Poles. See, for example, Padraic Kenney’s discussion of the city of Wrocław, which had been until the end of World War II a part of Germany. Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). Also see Amy Alrich, “Germans Displaced from the East: Crossing Actual and Imagined Central European Borders, 1944-1955” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2003), 220-34; and Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ-DDR und in Polen, 1945-1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

¹⁴ Aniela Daszewska, “Opiekujemy się dzieckiem,” *Kobieta*, no. 5 (December 1947): 6-7; Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet*, 7; ZWLK Łódź, *25 lat Ligi Kobiet*, 20; SOLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Głównego*, 21-23; and I. Czech, “Do izby dworcowej matki i dziecka,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1947): 10-15.

¹⁵ Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet*, 7; “Opieka społeczna i opieka nad matką i dzieckiem”; “Domy matki i dziecka,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (February-March 1948): 28; “Instytucje Opieki Społecznej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (February-March 1948): 28-29; and SOLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Głównego*, 21.

¹⁶ Zofia Ordyńska, “Liga Kobiet adoptuje sieroty wojenne,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 5 (March 1947): 14.

improve material, health, and cultural conditions for families.¹⁷ Members' discourse centered on women's special responsibility to provide a safe, peaceful, and happy environment for their children, and frequently invoked statements about the destruction of families in the war and need to restore family life.¹⁸

To assist women in fulfilling their multiple obligations, chapters offered numerous courses for women to prepare them for employment. Women needed to work not only because many were widowed mothers, but also because one income was insufficient for most families' survival in the postwar period.¹⁹ Women experienced difficulties in finding work since many had no skills and in some cases employers did not want to hire them.²⁰ To assist women, the League held courses in nursing, typing, bookkeeping, childcare, and administrative and library work, but the most common courses were in textile-related fields: sewing, weaving, knitting, embroidery, and quilt, slipper, button,

¹⁷ To some degree, the League continued to advocate these types of services for children throughout its existence. For some examples of these initiatives, see "Liga Kobiet przy pracy," *Kobieta*, no. 11 (February 1948): 5; "Pracujemy," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 8 (1 July 1946): 16-17; "Ratujemy dzieci przed gruźlicą," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 10 (August 1946): 15; Tom., "W Miedzeszynie i Wilczej Porębie," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 12 (September 1947): 8; "Liga Kobiet przy pracy," *Kobieta*, no. 11 (February 1948): 5; Zofia Ordyńska, "Byłyśmy z gwiazdką na wsi," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 3 (February 1947): 14; Zofia Ordyńska, "Wszystko dla naszych milusińskich," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 3 (February 1947): 14; "Przed świętami," *Kobieta*, no. 5 (December 1947): 3-4; Aniela Daszewska, "Opiekujemy się dzieckiem," *Kobieta*, no. 5 (December 1947): 6-7; "Liga Kobiet w sierpniu założyła żłobek," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 11 (September 1946): 16; Zofia Ordyńska, "Błogosławieństwo żłobków i przedszkoli," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 4 (February 1947): 15; "Każde dziecko musi mieć mleko," *Kobieta*, no. 11 (February 1948): 3-4; Maria Rudolf-Skokowska, "Dyskutujemy: Czy to takie ważne?" *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1947): 19-21; and Redakcja, "Niemowlęta muszą mieć mleko," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1947): 21-22.

¹⁸ Given that Poland continued to experience a civil war, this call for safety and peace is not surprising. For some examples of the League's early activism as it related to motherhood and peace, see Elżbieta Antoniak, "Więcej szacunku dla człowieka," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 11 (September 1946): 2; Jadwiga Werne, "Chłopcy z lasu," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 3 (February 1947): 2-3; "Zbieramy podpisy," *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 6-7 (April 1947): 7; SOLK, *Statut Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet* (Warsaw: SOLK, 1948), File "Liga Kobiet, 1945-1950," sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN; and "Pierwsza Konferencja Krajowa Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet," 25 February 1946, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie Wydział Kobiety," sygn. PPR Kr 347, APK.

¹⁹ This is true for Eastern Europe in general throughout the communist period. Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, 116.

²⁰ Malgorzata Fidelis, "Equality through Protection: The Politics of Women's Employment in Postwar Poland, 1945-1956," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 2 (summer 2004): 301-24, esp. 310. As Fidelis has stated, some women organized demonstrations as a way to demand work.

and hat making.²¹ The majority of these courses were in “feminized” fields in which women had already worked prior to the war. In some places, chapters even created their own workplaces for women, particularly in the field of sewing.²²

Through these initiatives the League exhibited its emphasis on assisting children and mothers in need rather than the state. Members typically omitted discussions of socialist ideology and propaganda. The organization did not stress national economic policy as the goal of encouraging women to work but individual women’s personal needs in the context of the postwar era. Traditional views of motherhood and gender differences marked League activism in these years. Women were nurturers charged with caring for others in need, they worked in traditionally female jobs, and they had specific women’s responsibilities.

Working and Mothering for the State, 1948 to 1953

Following the consolidation of the League in 1948, the organization, and especially its agitators, emerged as an important force in spreading propaganda to and about women regarding women’s roles as mothers and workers.²³ The League emphasized propaganda over actual programs. The socialist female worker and socialist mother were important in these campaigns, yet women’s productive role often emerged as central. Although the League depicted women’s emancipation as the ultimate goal of women’s labor force participation, the discourse used focused almost exclusively on assisting the state rather than women.²⁴

²¹ See especially Barbara Gołabek, “Rola LK w aktywizacji zawodowej kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1980): 48-61, esp. 49; and Melania Mroczek-Szymańska, “Liga Kobiet Polskich—jej dzieje, tradycje, i udział w budowaniu współczesności,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1987): 2-8.

²² See, for example, Rido-Zo., “Szyjemy za 150 zł.,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 11 (September 1946): 14. Kazimiera C. mentioned a longtime organizer of the League who developed something of this nature, probably in the late 1940s. Kazimiera C., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000. Agnieszka Barłóg, in her autobiographical novel, mentioned that the League in the city of Koszalin organized a cafeteria, sewing work room, and store, where women were able to take on employment. See Agnieszka Barłóg, *Szara myszka* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1980), 61.

²³ Zofia Sokół likewise portrays an activism based on propaganda as being central to League initiatives during this period. Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945-95* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1998), chap. 4.

²⁴ Izabela Ratman-Liwerska has found that the League functioned for ideological issues rather than for women during this era in the Białystok region. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik*

The party's Six-Year Plan, which commenced in 1950, set production goals and stressed the need to industrialize the country. Party leaders expected, encouraged, and needed women to participate in meeting these economic goals. Women's participation in employment, as a result, grew at a faster rate than men's.²⁵ In 1931 women made up 44.5 percent of the workforce (including women employed in agriculture) and by 1950 that number grew only slightly to 44.7 percent.²⁶ What is significant is that women workers moved out of agricultural and domestic work and into industry and other services, and the percentage of married working women increased significantly.²⁷ In 1931, for example, 20 percent of women worked in nonagricultural occupations, but by 1960, 41 percent worked in such fields.²⁸ Only 18 percent of all women workers were married in 1950, but by 1960 the number grew to 55 percent, and by 1970 to 62 percent.²⁹

Officials recognized the League as an important avenue for reaching large cohorts of potential female workers as evidenced most directly by the Central Committee's *Uchwała Biura Politycznego* (Politburo Resolution), passed on 6 March 1950. The resolution's purpose was twofold: to delineate how women had already benefited from socialism, particularly in the work sector; and to direct the League to improve its actions regarding women's employment. In the style of "criticism and self-criticism," the resolution maintained that because of party leaders' tendency to ignore women's issues and relegate them to the Women's Division, League, and other women's groups (such as women's

społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet (na przykładzie badań na Białostoczyźnie) (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW w Białymstoku, 1984), 126.

²⁵ See Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka*, 82.

²⁶ Hanna Jędruszczak, "Employment in Poland in 1930-1960: Dynamics and Structure," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 18 (1968): 250-63, esp. 255.

²⁷ Prior to the Second World War in 1931, 46.1 percent of all employed women worked as domestic servants. Out of those women, only 4.5 percent were married. Władysław Mierzecki, "Praca zarobkowa kobiet w środowisku robotniczym w Polsce międzywojennej," in *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse: Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej*, ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 108-33, esp. 111.

²⁸ Barbara Łobodzińska, "The Education and Employment of Women in Contemporary Poland," *Signs* 3, no. 3 (spring 1978): 688-97, esp. 689.

²⁹ Adam Kurzynowski, "Aktywność zawodowa kobiet w 40-leciu PRL," in *Kobiety polskie: Praca zbiorowa*, ed. Elżbieta Konecka (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), 300-28, esp. 311. See also Adam Kurzynowski, *Aktywizacja zawodowa kobiet zamężnych w Polsce Ludowej: Geneza—czynniki rozwoju—perspektywy* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1979).

commissions in factories and women's councils in agricultural groups), the League had started to lose sight of larger national matters, including the Six-Year Plan.³⁰ Members "repeatedly detached themselves from the main issues of the working class and isolated themselves in a narrow range of exclusively women's issues," stated the resolution.³¹ The organization, it claimed, had not participated in promoting women's entrance into the workforce to a sufficient degree, and the party resolved to alter this situation.

To meet its industrialization goals, the state turned directly to women as the reserve labor force. The Six-Year Plan called for 1,230,000 new women workers, 900,000 of them skilled (typically meaning jobs previously defined as masculine). They hoped that women, by the end of the economic plan, would constitute one-third of the workforce (outside of agriculture).³² By 1954, women made up 33 percent of the workforce outside of agriculture, but this growth probably resulted from real financial needs of families (one breadwinner per family was not adequate in meeting needs) rather than concerted efforts in reaching these goals.³³ The resolution instructed League members to urge women and girls to enter the workforce and occupational training programs, especially in the so-called *nowe*

³⁰ This criticism is similar to the criticism officials expressed when they decided to dissolve the Women's Divisions in 1952/1953, as discussed in chapter 1.

³¹ KC PZPR, *W sprawie pracy wśród kobiet: Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR* (Warsaw: KC PZPR, 1950), 12. On discussions of the resolution within League publications, see Irena Sztachelska, "Zadania Ligi Kobiet w świetle uchwały Biura Politycznego KC PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (April 1950): 3-17, esp. 7; "Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (April 1950): 18-25, esp. 20; "Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR w sprawie pracy wśród kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (March 1950): 3-12; and Alicja Musiałowa, "Zadania ruchu kobiecego w realizacji Planu 6-letniego," *Nasza praca*, no. 16 (October 1950): 3-21, esp. 13. The League and its leaders officially accepted these criticisms and frequently made the same critiques of the organization. See, for example, M. Wawrykowa, "Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet: Za I-szy kwartał 1951 r.," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (May 1951): 14-21, esp. 20; "Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet o zadaniach organizacyjnych w roku 1952," *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (April 1952): 15-24, esp. 20; Stanisława Zawadecka, "Zadania pracy wśród kobiet w świetle wytycznych VII-go Plenum KC PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1952): 12-25, esp. 15-16, 24; and "Wytyczne pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1953," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1953): 3-18, esp. 10.

³² Stanisława Zawadecka, "Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet i wytyczne dalszej pracy," Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, *Nasza praca*, no. 6-7 (March-April 1951): 42-62, esp. 44; Musiałowa, "Zadania ruchu kobiecego," 4; Jerzy Z. Holzer and Halina Wasilawska-Trenkner, "Poland," in *Working Women in Socialist Countries*, 129-65, esp. 130; and Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 78.

³³ Siemińska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka*, 82; and Kurzynowski, *Aktywizacja zawodowa kobiet zamężnych w Polsce Ludowej*, 21.

zawody (new occupations), which had until then been reserved primarily for men.³⁴ More specifically, the League “should move away from organizing minor courses in the field of traditional women’s work—to a wide action recruiting several thousand women’s representatives into industrial, metallurgical, transportation, chemical, agrotechnical, [and] textile schools.”³⁵ All but one (textiles) of these occupations were in “masculine” fields of employment. League and party leaders differentiated “important productive” work from “insignificant nonproductive” work, using domestic service as the primary example of the latter. They expressed pride in the fact that domestic service, a feminized “nonproductive” field in which a large percentage of women had previously worked, had declined significantly since the war.³⁶ According to a Central Committee party report, the percentage of women working in domestic service dropped from 45 percent in the interwar period to 5 percent of all women workers.³⁷ Party leaders wanted the League to “resolutely combat” “reactionary” forces that impeded women’s entrance into these “new occupations,” support women’s advancement into upper managerial positions, assist women in raising their work skills, and stress the importance of a socialist work discipline.³⁸

The League’s Central Administration “greeted the resolution with joy,”³⁹ and for the next three years, the organization and its leaders continuously advocated an image of the working woman that resembled the party’s depiction.⁴⁰ During the First All-Polish League of Women Congress held in

³⁴ KC PZPR, *W sprawie pracy wśród kobiet*, 9; “Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR,” 9; and Zawadecka, “Zadania pracy wśród kobiet,” 16-17. On the tensions of promoting “new occupations” in Poland, see especially Fidelis, “Equality through Protection,” 312-18.

³⁵ KC PZPR, *W sprawie pracy wśród kobiet*; and “Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR,” 9.

³⁶ Zawadecka, “Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet,” 45; and Sztachelska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet,” 3-4.

³⁷ KC PZPR, *W sprawie pracy wśród kobiet*, 4.

³⁸ “Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR,” 9; and “Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (April 1950): 18-25, esp. 22.

³⁹ “Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 18.

⁴⁰ For some examples of embracement of this resolution and women’s role in the workforce, see, for example, Sztachelska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet,” 11; Edwarda Orłowska, “Zagadnienie kadr kobiecych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (June 1950): 3-12, esp. 11; Zawadecka, “Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet,” 44; “Apel kongresu do kobiet polskich,” Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, 76-78, esp. 76; “Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet w III kwartale 1951 roku,” 1951, File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-30, AAN; “Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 22; and “Krótki zarys założenia Ligi Kobiet.”

1951, for example, meeting Six-Year Plan goals was one of two major issues (the other was peace) addressed by leaders and delegates.⁴¹ Each year following the resolution, the League included incorporating women into the workforce as one of its most important assignments. For 1951, for instance, the group's plans listed bringing women into all areas of the economy, especially into "new occupations," as number three out of seven issues on its agenda. This task included mobilizing "new hands for work," especially those of housewives who were yet to be employed and young women fresh out of school. Only "enlightenment work among women" and incorporation of more women into the political system, both of which were related to party goals, preceded women's work.⁴² In 1952 and 1953, women's employment again held a prominent place in the League's agenda.⁴³ The assignments for all three years placed women's work higher on the list of priorities than women's maternal roles and their position within the household. Reflecting its primary concern to advance party-state goals, the League advocated women's participation in production in its internal bulletins, through its agitators, and in lectures and organized discussions held in chapter offices, local schools, and factories.⁴⁴ And in workplaces, members participated in and urged other workers to engage in work competitions and become *przodownice pracy* (work leaders).

The organization typically linked discussions of motherhood to larger party goals, especially industrialization and peace campaigns.⁴⁵ It almost exclusively emphasized assisting the state in meeting

⁴¹ Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress.

⁴² "Ramowy plan pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1951," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (January 1951): 4-16, quotation on 6. The same list is provided in M. Wawrzykowska, "Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet za 1-szy kwartał 1951 r.," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (May 1951): 14-21.

⁴³ "Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet o zadaniach organizacyjnych w roku 1952," 17; and "Wytyczne pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1953."

⁴⁴ Agitators, for example, were instructed to "mobilize thus far nonemployed women to work in every branch of our economy, especially . . . in new occupations. They should explain how significant the participation of as many women as possible in production is, [and] discuss the meaning of planned work, work discipline, work organization, application of new work methods, work competition, training courses, [and] raising skills." Irena Nowakowska, "Przodownica społeczna pracuje," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1953): 38-42, quotation on 40. See also "Sprawozdanie z realizacji wniosków KW PZPR przez Zarząd Warszawski L.K. za okres I półrocze 1951 r.," 1951, File "KC PZPR," sygn. 237/XV-24, AAN.

⁴⁵ During this period, only a few articles in internal publications were specifically on motherhood. More common was one or two paragraphs within articles on topics that were more central to party interests, particularly the peace campaign and Six-Year Plan.

its goals and spreading official policy among women rather than aiding women as mothers. When advocating the use and growth of childcare facilities and preschools, for example, League leaders ultimately exhibited concern about reaching state-determined economic goals, and not how this growth would aid working women.⁴⁶ Following a devastating war, a call for pacifism to ensure a secure and safe future for children is not at all surprising.⁴⁷ However, the League, as Eastern European party-states more generally, equated peace with socialism. Only socialism and women's involvement in it would guarantee peace for future generations of Poland as well as the entire world, the League claimed. Women, as mothers or potential mothers, had a specific role in peace campaigns. The connection between pacifism and motherhood worked in two directions: the League informed women that if they instilled patriotic and socialist values in their children, they worked toward achieving peace, and if they engaged in peace activism, they would create a secure future for their children.⁴⁸

Playing on women's maternal emotions figured into discussions of suffering and war in other parts of the world as well. At the 1951 congress, Musiałowa turned to Polish mothers' sympathy for Korean mothers in an effort to illustrate the horrors of American policies. "Less than six years after the gruesome suffering . . . , again there is bloodshed, again mothers and wives are mourning the loss of their loved ones. How can a Polish mother's heart not feel the pain and compassion when she thinks

⁴⁶ For some examples, see "Krajowa odprawa Ligi Kobiet w sprawie opieki," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (June 1950): 34-36; "Więcej kobiet do produkcji," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 7-8 (1950): 16-22; "Zadania przodownic społecznych w związku z Narodowym Plebiscytem Pokoju," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 3-4 (1951): 1-37; "Kobieta pracuje zawodowo," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1952): 3-28; "Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 5 (1951): 1-31; Elżbieta Wyżewska, "W trosce o dziecko matki pracującej," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1953): 8-10; "Możemy być spokojne o swoje dzieci," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1955): 18-19; Sztachelska, "Zadania Ligi Kobiet," 12; "Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," 22; and Musiałowa, "Zadania ruchu kobiecego," 17. For a more detailed discussion of the links between services and the Six-Year Plan, see chapter 2.

⁴⁷ The League often invoked concern about women losing their husbands and sons to yet another war. See, for example, "Stenogram z popołudniowych obrad II-go dnia Konferencji Krajowej Ligi Kobiet z dnia 26.IX.1949 r.," 26 September 1949, File "KC PZPR," sygn. 237/XV-28, AAN; "Kobiety! Polki! Matki! Żony i Siostry!" *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1949): 1-5, esp. 1; and "Ocena z dotychczasowego przebiegu zebrań sprawozdawczo-wyborczych L.K. na zakładach pracy i kołach terenowych za okres od 26.XI.-26.I.1952 r.," 1952, File "KC PZPR," sygn. 237/XV-17, AAN.

⁴⁸ For some examples of these arguments, see "Kobiety! Polki! Matki! Żony i Siostry!" 2; "Zadania przodownic społecznych w związku z Narodowym Plebiscytem Pokoju," 6, 28-29; "Kobiety polskie matki i żony," *Nasza praca*, no. 19 (November 1950): 3-5, esp. 3; "Zadania przodownic społecznych na odcinku pogłębienia socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 5 (1950): 33-38; Halina Rudnicka and ZGLK, *Kobiety mówią o sobie* (Warsaw: Spółdzielnia Wydawniczo-Oświatowa "Czytelnik," 1952), 49; and Zofia Wasilkowska, *Kobiety w walce o pokój* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Popularno-Naukowe Wiedza Powszechna, 1953).

about the tortuous experience of Korean mothers, whose children American war criminals are murdering.”⁴⁹ Applying arguments of maternal compassion and sympathy, Musiałowa attempted to shape women’s perceptions of the United States and the West as warmongers and socialist countries as pacifists. The connection between motherhood and peace ultimately worked to solidify socialist ideology.

Mothers also had a specific and critical role in raising children according to socialist principles. If under partitioned Poland an ideal image of a woman, the *Matka Polka* (or the Patriotic Polish Mother),⁵⁰ was developed, then the propagandists of the stalinist period formed their own trope, what I have termed here the *Matka Socjalistka* (the Socialist Mother), an employed and socially active mother whose task was to bring up future generations of the socialist state.⁵¹ Similar to the *Matka Polka*, the *Matka Socjalistka* was called to instill patriotic values in her children. But under stalinism, the ideal mother no longer struggled for an independent Poland but for the development of a new socialist system (or, in other words, not for nationalism but for socialism). The future of socialism depended on molding youth into party members and loyal citizens, and the *Matka Socjalistka* had an especially critical role in this development. One way of doing this was to encourage mothers to work

⁴⁹ Alicja Musiałowa, “Zadania kobiet polskich w walce o pokój i plan 6-letni,” Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, 22-41, quotation on 27.

⁵⁰ Scholars have translated *Matka Polka* in numerous ways including holy mother of Poland, Polish Mother, Mother Poland, and Patriotic Mother. I define it here as Patriotic Polish Mother, since the translation of Polish Mother and Mother Poland, the most common, do not encompass the patriotism that the image depicted. *Matka Polka* was a dominant image of womanhood under partitioned Poland in the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth century. On *Matka Polka*, see especially Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze, feministki: Kobiety dyskurs emancypacyjny w Polsce* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo eFKa, 1999), esp. 53-56; Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, “Women in Polish Society: A Historical Introduction,” in *Women in Polish Society*, ed. Rudolf Jaworski and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1992), 1-29; Rudolf Jaworski, “Polish Women and the Nationality Conflict in the Province of Posen at the Turn of the Century,” in *ibid.*, 53-70; Małgorzata Fidelis, “‘Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation’: Polish Women Intellectuals in the Cultural Construction of Female Gender Roles, 1864-1890,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13, no. 1 (spring 2001): 108-31; and Ewa Hauser, “Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender: The Case of Poland,” *Genders* 22 (fall 1995): 78-105. Padraic Kenney has shown how the image of the *Matka Polka* was used in the 1980s by both the opposition and officials. See Padraic Kenney, “Pojęcie ‘Matki-Polki’ w języku opozycji i władzy,” in *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2001), 338-51.

⁵¹ The League propagated and promoted the image of the *Matka Socjalistka* to some degree throughout the communist period, but it did so most strongly and openly under stalinism. The Czechoslovak Union of Women likewise stressed women’s specific role in creating future citizens as well as urging husbands to improve their productivity. Sharon L. Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality: The Status of Women in Eastern Europe” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980), 318.

cooperatively with *Komitety Rodzicielskie* (Parental Committees), which linked home and school, a mechanism for the state to infiltrate the private home sphere and control parents and students.⁵² To help mothers raise good socialist citizens, the League educated mothers about “hygiene, nourishment, basic pedagogical principles, and ideological upbringing” through its courses for mothers, exhibits, lectures, and encouragement of reading up on current events.⁵³ In this case, the organization served a maternal role by raising daughters, that is “backward” and uninformed mothers supposedly in need of enlightenment, who, once educated, were to use the knowledge they acquired to bring up their own children. Good motherhood, then, was a skill to be learned rather than a natural instinct that all women possessed.

During the stalinist period, the woman worker in a “masculine” area of employment and the *Matka Socjalistka* took over the nurturing mother of the immediate postwar era working in a feminized sector. The woman worker, especially in “new occupations,” combined with the mother who instilled socialist values in her children, emerged as the ideal woman. The League often portrayed working women as more enlightened than nonworking women, and agitators set out to shape housewives into informed, employed, and loyal citizens of the state. Assisting the state in meeting its political and economic goals became women’s most important obligation as workers and mothers. The League’s stance during this period was to promote official propaganda.

Destalinization, 1953 to 1956: A Turning Point for Motherhood?

Following Stalin’s death in March 1953, the Soviet Union followed by Eastern European countries set out on a process of destalinization, a process which brought about greater diversity among party-states, some softening of police forces and repression, mitigation of some international tensions, de-emphasis of heavy industrialization, and increased attention to standards of living and access to

⁵² For some examples see, “Wytyczne pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1953,” 10; “8-marca Międzynarodowy Dzień Kobiet,” *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 2 (1952): 3-38, esp. 31-32; and Rudnicka and ZGLK, *Kobiety mówią o sobie*, 35. Discussions of parental committees emerged in all subsequent periods of the League’s history.

⁵³ Irena Sztachelska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet w walce o pokój,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1949): 3-14, quotation on 13. See also Szczęsna-Bilińska, “Ocena prac opiekuńczych w roku 1949,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1950): 38-43.

consumer goods.⁵⁴ Eastern bloc countries engaged in the thaw to varying degrees and began the process at different times within that year. In October 1953, at a plenary session of the party's Central Committee, Poland was the last country to embark on the New Course.⁵⁵ At the meeting, leaders announced the need to focus on the everyday needs of workers and farmers by lowering prices; improving the availability of necessary goods; building more apartments, as well as healthcare, cultural, and social centers; providing more facilities for consumer goods and social services; and increasing agricultural products.⁵⁶ Destalinization, however, was limited. The Soviet Union maintained much of its political control, propaganda continued, and terror was not completely erased.

A few weeks after the party's plenum, the League held its own plenum in which members addressed the new direction for the organization and country.⁵⁷ Like the party-state, the organization moved away from its previous focus on the Six-Year Plan and peace campaigns and made standards of living central to its initiatives. Working women also gradually lost prominence as the importance of motherhood grew exponentially. By 1954, for example, women's maternal responsibilities preceded their obligations as workers in League assignments. Its first goal emphasized the group's role in ensuring a happy future for children, and women's employment appeared fourth.⁵⁸ The League's turn toward motherhood also was linked to the party's earlier decision to dissolve the organization's

⁵⁴ Thomas W. Simons, Jr., *Eastern Europe in the Postwar World*, 2d. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), chap. 5; Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), chap. 8; and Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, trans. Jane Cave (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 266-68.

⁵⁵ Brzezinski has argued that to some degree Poland's later thaw "could be explained by the previous policy of caution. Stalinism had been gingerly and timidly distilled in Poland. . . . [I]t involved a little less violence within the party itself, less collectivization, and fewer compulsory deliveries for the farmers, and a little more circumspection in outright imitation and adulation of all things Soviet. Furthermore, the general instability of the economy, widespread poverty, and weakness of the party might have convinced the leadership. . . that a point of no return had been reached and that a sharp reversal would be dangerous." Brzezinski, *Soviet Bloc*, 165.

⁵⁶ Alicja Musiałowa, "W trosce o dalszą poprawę warunków życiowych mas pracujących," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (December 1953): 3-12, esp. 6.

⁵⁷ On the meeting, see especially *ibid.*; and "Uchwała Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet z dnia 16.XI.53 r. o zadaniach Ligi Kobiet w walce o szybsze podniesienie stopy życiowej mas pracujących," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (December 1953): 27-29.

⁵⁸ "Uchwała: Prezydium Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet w sprawie przeprowadzenia kampanii sprawozdawczo-wyborczej w naszej organizacji w 1954 r.," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (May 1954): 25-27, esp. 25.

workplace chapters for the first, but not last, time and to focus specifically on housewives and rural women.⁵⁹

The League's shift to residential areas, withdrawal from an emphasis on "new occupations" for women, and newfound focus on motherhood also reflected economic reforms, which deemphasized industrialization, particularly in the heavy sector, as part of the general movement away from stalinist policies. Postwar labor shortages turned to growing unemployment, especially among women. By 1956, approximately 80 percent of the 47,000 Poles registered as unemployed were women.⁶⁰ State officials perceived women's contribution to the workforce as increasingly less valuable. To counter these trends, League leaders, party officials, and certain elements of society encouraged women to take on their "traditional" female roles as mothers.⁶¹ Male workers, especially in traditionally masculine occupations, in particular urged women to return to the home, and some women protested their unfair dismissals.⁶² In a letter signed by "'desperate fathers of families'" to party secretary Bolesław Bierut, men called for an increase in family allowances so that women could go back home.⁶³ Women's entrance into the workforce, and into heavy industry especially, was seen as part of the repressive stalinist system that sought to redefine gender roles. Party-state officials began to argue that women were not suitable for "new occupations," and factory inspectors shifted discussions to female reproduction.⁶⁴ Not all women workers, however, were enthusiastic about giving up work in "new

⁵⁹ See, for example, KC PZPR, *W sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet: Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR* (Warsaw: KC PZPR, July 1953), File "Kobiety w Polsce Ludowej," sygn. I Id., DZS, BN.

⁶⁰ Małgorzata Fidelis, "'New Occupations' and Traditional Hierarchies: The Case of Women Coalminers in Postwar Poland, 1951-1957," paper presented at the annual American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies conference, Toronto, November 2003.

⁶¹ Fidelis, in her study of the effects of destalinization on gender roles, argues that during this period "the reforms of the Stalinist system triggered a strengthening of precommunist gender hierarchies and male authority over women," primarily by promoting the image of the mother. Women's biological differences gained prominence. See Fidelis, "Equality through Protection," 303. See also Roman Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn w Polsce Ludowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1975), 112; and Siemieńska, *Pleć, zawód, polityka*, 82.

⁶² Fidelis, "'New Occupations' and Traditional Hierarchies," and Fidelis, "Equality through Protection," 322-23.

⁶³ Cited in Fidelis, "Equality through Protection," 318-19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

occupations” and returning home to raise children. In fact, some women enjoyed their newfound opportunities and resisted being pushed back into traditional roles.⁶⁵

The growing focus on motherhood manifested itself most directly in two conferences on motherhood: the National Conference for Mothers in June 1955 organized by the League and an international counterpart in July 1955, which League members attended. Before and during the conferences, the organization’s internal bulletin was filled with articles specifically on motherhood. The bulletin no longer presented the woman worker as deserving utmost respect, now mothers were given that honor. Instructions for a lecture, for example, maintained that women did not have to forego motherhood for fear of losing their jobs and losing financial stability. “Today motherhood is the pride of women. Mothers of many children are rewarded and surrounded by widespread respect.”⁶⁶ This statement could even be interpreted as a pronatalist stance, encouraging women to have more children and choose motherhood over working outside the home. Following the conferences, the Central Administration formed a Commission for the Affairs of Mothers and Children, further pointing to the significance that the League placed on motherhood-related issues.⁶⁷

In the following years, members often depicted 1955 as a turning point, as a departure from propaganda to activism that focused on women’s actual needs, particularly in terms of raising children. They criticized the previous period for ignoring women’s role as mothers and focusing too extensively on their worker role.⁶⁸ However, although motherhood became central, discussions continued to

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Pogadanka na Międzynarodowy Dzień Dziecka,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (May 1955): insert.

⁶⁷ Maria Aszkenazy, “Wykonujemy uchwały Krajowej Narady Matek,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1956): 10-11; and Eugenia Pragierowa, “Z prac Podkomisji Prawno-Społecznej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (December 1955): 10-11. The Commission was further divided into educational, health, production and provisions, and legal-social subcommissions. The educational subcommission was mostly concerned with linking school and home and instructing parents about the benefits of education within the home. The subcommission on health centered on immunizations, hygiene and sanitation, and close cooperation with the Health Ministry. The third subcommission focused on ensuring the availability of necessary items for children and domestic goods. Finally the legal-social subcommission centered its activism on the juvenile court system and alimony and child support disputes.

⁶⁸ “Dyskusja,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 7-18, quotation on 7. For other examples, see also Aszkenazy, “Wykonujemy uchwały Krajowej Narady Matek”; Alicja Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej wygłoszony na II Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet,” in *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet (materiały): Warszawa, 11-13 lipiec 1957r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1957), 3-19, esp. 8; “Podkomisja wychowania pomaga matkom w wychowaniu dzieci,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1956): 24; “XX,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1965): 7-65, esp. 43-44; and Klementyna Witkowska,

incorporate propaganda; the League preserved the stalinist image of the *Matka Socjalistka*.⁶⁹ In emphasizing motherhood, League leaders often stressed how much People's Poland had offered to women and children, reiterating much of stalinist-era rhetoric. In her speech at the national conference for mothers, for example, Musiałowa claimed that "today, every mother can await the arrival of a child into this world with happiness and hope." A child can grow up into "a useful and valued worker. . . . People's Poland ensures the development of broader and broader comprehensive care for mothers and children, [and] it creates better and better conditions to raise our children properly." She also illustrated the importance of keeping up with current events to educate children. Only politically enlightened women, she suggested, would be able to raise their children properly according to socialist principles.⁷⁰

Both change and continuity characterized the destalinization era. Discussions shifted to an emphasis on maternity/family over work roles for women and simultaneously continued to focus on assisting the state over assisting women. Tied to a growing focus on women's reproduction within Eastern Europe, women's role as mothers dominated League discussions, while their work role moved into the shadows. This shift, however, did not result in placing women's interests at the center of its activism. Although members in later years often interpreted the 1955 conferences as the beginning of the organization's emphasis on assisting women, the discourse used at the time was steeped in stalinist-era propaganda. The greater and more significant turning point occurred one year later, when the League for the first time openly started to criticize its stalinist-era activism and began to explore a new direction, which focused on both maternity and work.

"Sprawy opieki nad dzieckiem," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1980): 71-74, esp. 72. Sokół has also evaluated 1955 as the year of "rebirth" for the organization. Sokół, *Prasa kobieca*, 137.

⁶⁹ Numerous covers of the bulletin, for example, included such slogans as "Peace—is our families' happiness," "The struggle for peace—is a struggle for your family's success and a peaceful life for your child," and "We are fighting for peace and our children's happiness," indicating that the League continued to stress assisting the state and building socialism. *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1955): cover; *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1955): cover; and *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1955): cover.

⁷⁰ Alicja Musiałowa, "Dziecko—największa nasza troska," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1955): 6-9, quotation on 7.

A Decade of “Practical Activism,” 1956 to 1966

The year 1956 was a significant turning point not only for the League but also for Eastern Europe more generally. In February, in his speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the Soviet party secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced stalinist-era tactics, revealed Stalin’s crimes, and condemned the “cult of personality.” The leaking of his speech to the rest of the world led to what one historian has called “a moment of catharsis for the whole of communism.”⁷¹ By mid-1956, Poland experienced an easing of censorship, which resulted in more open discussions in the media; a decline in terror from the security service; and the growth of a popular movement advocating democratization led by students and intellectuals. Poles, including many party members, began to reveal their dissatisfaction, concerns, and desires more explicitly, and sought cultural, political, and economic changes. In June 1956, workers rioted in the city of Poznań and demanded improvements. A few months later, in October, Poland was on the brink of a Soviet military invasion due to its movement away from the Soviet Union’s road to socialism. Instead, the demonstrations resulted in the election of Poland’s popular communist leader, Władysław Gomułka, to the position of party secretary, an increased openness in society, and hope for further changes.⁷²

⁷¹ Nicholas Bethell, *Gomułka: His Poland, His Communism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 200. On the consequences of the Twentieth Congress for Eastern Europe, see Jerzy Tomaszewski, *The Socialist Regimes of East Central Europe: Their Establishment and Consolidation, 1944-67*, trans. Jolanta Krauze (New York: Routledge, 1989), pt. 3.

⁷² During the stalinist period, Gomułka had been thrown out of the party and arrested for allegedly anticommunist attitudes and directly defying Stalin particularly on the issue of agricultural collectivization. He was rehabilitated by the party in April 1956 and reinstated shortly thereafter. For some studies on Gomułka, see, for example, Bethell, *Gomułka*; Jan Ptasiński, *Drugi zwrot: Gomułka w szczytu powodzenia* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988); and Bronisław Syzdek, ed., *Władysław Gomułka we wspomnieniach* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo lubelskie, 1989). For some studies on the crises of 1956, see Krystyna Kersten, “1956—Turning Point,” in *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945-89*, ed. Odd Arne Westad, Sven Holtsmark, and Iver B. Neumann (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 47-62; Jerzy Eisler and Robert Kupiecki, *Na zakręcie historii: Rok 1956* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1992); Andrzej Korboński, “Październik 1956,” *Zeszyty historyczne*, no. 78 (1986): 36-78; Edmund Makowski and Stanisław Jankowiak, eds., *Przełomowy rok 1956: Poznański czerwiec, Polski październik, Budapeszt: Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej, Poznań, 26-27 czerwca 1996 roku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1998); Wiesław Władyka, *Październik 56* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1994); Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crisis in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (1998): 163-214; Jakub Karpiński, *Countdown: The Polish Upheavals of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 . . .*, trans. Olga Amsterdamska and Gene M. Moore (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishers, Inc., 1982), esp. chap. 2; and Antoni Dudek and Tomasz Marszałkowski, *Walki uliczne w PRL, 1956-1989* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Geo, 1999), chap. 1.

The League likewise participated in this “moment of catharsis” by demanding more “honesty” within the organization, criticizing its stalinist-era propaganda-laden activism, and calling for initiatives that would assist women in their everyday lives.⁷³ For the next decade, leaders and rank-and-file members stressed women’s needs and focused on alleviating their multiple burdens by promoting “practical activism.”⁷⁴ They turned to discussions of combining women’s maternal and work obligations, and the mother, especially the working mother, became a notable topic of interest. This “practical activism” did not completely obliterate stalinist-era propaganda,⁷⁵ but it did move it to the sidelines. The League continued on this path for approximately one decade, until 1966 when party leaders directed the organization to dissolve its workplace chapters (after they were reinstated in 1957) and focus its activism solely in residential areas.⁷⁶

Beginning with discussions in preparation for the League’s second national conference held in 1957, members, as well as some women who were not affiliated with the group, openly engaged in often heated discussions about reconciling work with maternal and domestic responsibilities and alleviating women’s multiple burdens.⁷⁷ It is not surprising that women turned to these issues. In the interwar period, few married women worked (outside of agriculture), but by the mid-1950s, they made up a significant portion of the labor force, resulting in the need to reconcile family with work. Between 1950 and 1960, married women’s participation in the labor force quadrupled. In 1950, 308,000 and by

Hungary was not as fortunate as Poland. The Soviet army invaded Hungary in 1956, destroyed much of the capital city of Budapest, and arrested and executed the country’s popular communist leader, Imré Nagy.

⁷³ Ratman-Liwerska also found this to be the case. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 80-81.

⁷⁴ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” 9. As Ratman-Liwerska has stated, to some degree the League retreated to its first statute from the immediate postwar era. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 81-82.

⁷⁵ The League continued, for example, to stress ideological education of women throughout this period. See, for instance, ZGLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet w latach 1957-1961* (Warsaw: February 1962), File “Liga Kobiet, 1951-1967,” sygn. I3b, DZS, BN.

⁷⁶ On the recreation and dissolution of workplace chapters, see chap. 5.

⁷⁷ A conference sponsored and organized by the League in March 1965 is indicative of the importance that the group placed on the double burden. The title of the conference and subsequent publication was “Woman—Work—Home.” ZGLK, ed., *Kobieta—praca—dom: Problemy pracy zawodowej kobiet i rodziny współczesnej, materiały z konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Zarząd Główny Ligi Kobiet w dniach 25-27 marca 1965 r.* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związkowe CRZZ, 1967).

1960 1,356,000 married women worked outside the home.⁷⁸ In 1950, they composed only 4 percent of the labor force (outside of agriculture) and by 1960 that percentage grew to 25.⁷⁹ This actual shift in married women's workforce participation led the League and its leaders no longer to present combining production and reproduction as natural or easy. They exposed the inherent contradictions of socialist ideology.

Who was responsible for raising children: the state, mothers, or parents? How should children be raised? Could working women successfully fulfill their roles as workers and mothers simultaneously? What needed to be accomplished to assist working women, especially those with children? Participants in these discussions attempted to redefine women's roles as workers and mothers. Although the initial burst of energy and criticism died down quickly, for the next ten years these issues dominated debates.

Fed up with the group's focus on spreading propaganda and the League's as well as the state's neglect of women's problems during the stalinist period, numerous members and conference delegates demanded an organization attuned to women's everyday needs. In so doing, in general they homogenized women's needs by paying most attention to combining work and family. A physician and director of a psychology clinic for children in Warsaw, Zofia Szymańska, for instance, claimed that the organization "'lives on the moon,' is interested in various fictional problems, instead of helping women, especially mothers in the defense of women's interests."⁸⁰ At the conference, Musiałowa stated that the League should and could have "eased the difficulties in women's lives" during the previous era, but instead it had "fixed its attention primarily on propaganda work" and withdrew "from many

⁷⁸ Kurzynowski, "Aktywność zawodowa kobiet," 326, and Kurzynowski, *Aktywizacja zawodowa kobiet zamężnych*, 19.

⁷⁹ Kurzynowski, *Aktywizacja zawodowa kobiet zamężnych*, 21.

⁸⁰ "Rozmowy przedkongresowe," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1956): 4-17, 32, quotation on 14. These types of demands and criticism were typical of the League in 1956. For other examples, see Prezydium Zarządu Głównego, "Do Zarządów Wojewódzkich, Powiatowych i Miejskich, do kół Ligi Kobiet, do kół Gospodyń ZSCh, do wszystkich członkiń Ligi Kobiet w mieście i na wsi," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1956): 3-4; Alicja Musiałowa, "Wstępna analiza pracy Ligi Kobiet w okresie 10-lecia jej istnienia," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1956): 5-8; and "O przygotowaniach do akcji przedkongresowej – Mówi przewodnicząca Zarządu Łódzkiego Ligi Kobiet, Kol. Janina Kalinowska," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1956): 20-21.

forms of concrete activism.” She suggested that the League must retreat from the “excessive cult of women’s work” that had developed under stalinism and focus on women’s everyday needs instead.⁸¹

Opposing views of how best to aid working women entered the pages of publications, revealing that the organization by no means presented a unified single plan. Discussants challenged stalinist-era conceptions of working mothers and advanced new ideas about women’s maternal and work roles. For the first time, contributors to League publications did not always depict the worker-mother positively. Some medical experts and child caregivers, for example, attributed a rise in nervousness among youth to working mothers, who supposedly did not have enough time and energy for their children. As a result their children were not adequately supervised, leading to hooliganism and demoralization among Polish youth.⁸² By tracing children’s poor mental health to working mothers, Szymańska, for example, implied that mothers ideally should remain in the home. If they chose to or needed to work, they should do so part-time or from home, thereby allowing them more closely to supervise their children.⁸³ Promotion of part-time work and outwork can be interpreted in two ways. These options were a way to redirect women into the home, indicating the precedence of maternal/family obligations over work, yet they could also be seen as a way in which women were able more adequately to combine their roles as workers and mothers.⁸⁴

The vice president of the League’s provincial administration in the city of Katowice, Wiktoria Trepkowa, went further in her assessment, pushing working mothers back into the home. Trepkowa saw working as a detriment to mothers’ intellectual consciousness, children’s well-being, and employers’ financial bottom line. She suggested that family allowances be increased to allow women to

⁸¹ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” 7, 5.

⁸² These types of discussions began with the 1955 conference for mothers but became entrenched more deeply in League discourse in 1956. For some examples of new socialist morality and hooliganism, see “Mówią aktywistki poznańskich kół blokowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 37-38; Barbara Szolc, “Co dała moim uczennicom dyskusja nad sprawami małżeństwa i rodziny?” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 39; “Trzy konferencje—dziesiątki problemów: Z Warszawskich narad przedkongresowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 30-33; and “Uchwała: II Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet,” in *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*, 21-29, esp. 26.

⁸³ “Rozmowy przedkongresowe,” 14.

⁸⁴ On promotion of greater part-time employment and outwork opportunities for women, see also “Głosy terenu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 28-29, 38, esp. 28; M[aria] Winiarz, “Póletaty w Legnicy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1960): 31-34, M[aria] Winiarz, “Rozmowa o póletatach,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (15 June 1960): 41-42, and M[aria] Winiarz, “Jeszcze o póletatach,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (July 1960): 29-33.

stay at home. “Let them raise their children, and let those women who must and who want to work work.” Although she acknowledged that some women wanted to or had to work, in her opinion, whenever possible mothers should have remained in the home.⁸⁵ In contrast to the stalinist period when housewives were portrayed as “backward” and unenlightened, Trepkowa depicts working mothers as less intellectual.

To assist the family in raising children, the League offered courses and lectures in League chapters, in factories, and on the radio; published numerous articles on how to be good mothers and how to raise children; and formed a commission responsible for child rearing, headed by Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, an author of children’s literature and a vice-president of the Central Administration.⁸⁶ This turn toward alleviating some of women’s burdens also led to the formation of the League’s *Komitet d/s Gospodarstwa Domowego* (Committee for Home Economics Affairs) in 1957 and publication of a periodical on the work of this committee.⁸⁷ Motherhood was increasingly becoming scientific. Teachers, pedagogues, doctors, and specialists of various fields were called in to assist mothers in fulfilling their role. They often presented lectures and seminars for League chapters. Good motherhood was not natural; it had to be learned through the help of these experts.⁸⁸ The League held a national conference dealing with family issues; organized special festivities and published articles on International Children’s Day, 1 June; assisted mothers in finding summer programs; stressed

⁸⁵ “Dyskusja,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 7-18, quotation on 12. For another similar assessment, see “Trzy konferencje,” 33. Interestingly, arguments about housewives’ supposed backwardness also figured into these discussions. Some discussants claimed that working women were more enlightened than housewives because they had regular access to obtaining information about politics, culture, and economics in the workplace. Housewives, in contrast, were isolated and did not have this contact with the outside world. Here, instead, Trepkowa argued that working women were less intellectually stimulated than women who stayed at home raising their children.

⁸⁶ “Podkomisja wychowania pomaga matkom w wychowaniu dzieci”; “Czy LK może w tej sprawie pomóc? Między matką a córką,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1956): 12-15; J. Juzionowa, “II Zjazd—A pomoc rodzinie w opiece i wychowaniu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 17-28 (31 October 1957): 7-11, and J. Juzionowa, “Co zrobiła Komisja Wychowania,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10-62 (1 June 1958): 1-5.

⁸⁷ This is a topic that I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 4.

⁸⁸ Melania Mroczek, “Działalność Ligi Kobiet w roku 1964,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1964): 1-9; Zofia Konderska, “Nowe zadania z nowym sojusznikiem,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1965): 3-11; Weronika Jackowska, “Z obrad Prezydium ZGLK,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1966): 3-10; “Dalsze kierunki i formy działania Ligi Kobiet na obecnym etapie rozwoju ruchu kobiecego w kraju: Referat Prezydium Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1966): 3-29; Juzionowa, “Co zrobiła Komisja Wychowania,” 5; and Musiałowa, “Najważniejsze zadania Ligi Kobiet,” 9.

the need to develop children's activities and games; and emphasized the need for women to work with Parents' Committees in schools.⁸⁹ One of its most important initiatives was a decision in 1958 to form *poradnie* (clinics) for parents to provide individual consultations, lectures and readings on appropriate topics, and meetings with Parents' Committees. The clinics were primarily geared toward parents who faced difficulties in raising their children and addressed such topics as single motherhood, alcoholism, behavioral problems, hooliganism, working parents, and other difficulties.⁹⁰

Propaganda surrounding the *Matka Socjalistka* continued, but it took on a different form, particularly after the June and October crises in which some youth participated. In June 1956 in the city of Poznań strikes erupted among workers, who demanded better compensation, and led to larger street demonstrations. More rallies erupted throughout Poland in October when Poles demanded to reinstate Gomułka and called for improvements in standards of living. Officials later depicted these spontaneous events as acts of hooliganism.⁹¹ The League sided with the party-state, denouncing such acts of hooliganism by youth. Following the Poznań demonstrations, for example, the League published a letter to all League chapters and administrations, calling for members to be more concerned about raising youth properly and learn from this "extremely painful lesson." The letter maintained that "some youth caved into hostile influences . . . and raised its hands against the people's authorities," causing "heartbreak among mothers."⁹² Following the October events, the League passed a resolution in which it

⁸⁹ These are activities that the League always provided for women, but they became more prominent during these years.

⁹⁰ L. Franciszkiewicz, "Jedno z podstawowych zadań organizacji—rozwój poradnictwa," *Nasza praca*, no. 8-60 (15 May 1958): 7-11, L. Franciszkiewicz, "Jak pracują poszczególne poradnie LK," *Nasza praca*, no. 10-62 (1 June 1958): 11-17; and M. Kukulska, "Jak pracują poradnie LK," *Nasza praca*, no. 2-54 (31 January 1958): 7-16. All League administrations were supposed to form these clinics in 1958. By June 1958, the organization ran twenty such clinics throughout the country, and planned on creating one hundred additional clinics prior to the 1962 national conference. Juzionowa, "Co zrobiła Komisja Wychowania," and Juzionowa, "Przed III-cim zjazdem partii."

⁹¹ Polish sources indicated that thirty-eight people lost their lives and about three hundred were injured in the Poznań events, but Western sources gave much higher numbers. Karpiński, *Countdown*, 50. According to Timothy Garton Ash, at least fifty-three Poles lost their lives and hundreds were injured during the uprising. Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), 9.

⁹² ZGLK, "Do Zarządów Wojewódzkich, Powiatowych i Miejskich, do kół Ligi Kobiet, do kół Gospodyń ZSch, do wszystkich członkiń Ligi Kobiet w mieście i na wsi," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 3-4, quotation on 4.

called on the assistance of all mothers to instill “appropriate” values in their children.⁹³ It was partially mothers’ responsibility to ensure that such demonstrations would not occur in the future. It continued to be their task to raise loyal subjects of the socialist state.

During this period, most members did not advocate women’s sole identity with the home, domesticity, and motherhood. In fact, they promoted a worker-mother image more strongly than ever before, claiming that it was possible for women to do both if they received assistance in fulfilling their multiple roles. Women’s advancement and work skills, as well as family assistance and child rearing, for example, were the main topics of discussion at the Third National League of Women Conference in 1962.⁹⁴ Numerous members recognized that not enough had been done to help working mothers reconcile their roles, and they examined a variety of options, especially improvements in childcare, that would aid working mothers. They suggested, for example, that more childcare facilities be developed; that the age that a child could enter daycare be lowered to 2.5 months from 3 months; that daycare hours be extended for children whose mothers worked in the afternoons; that weeklong daycare be available for families with material and housing hardship; that daily boarding schools be developed for children whose parents were unable to take care of them due to work obligations; and that dinners in schools be provided for children of employed mothers.⁹⁵ These suggestions did not call for provisions and services that would allow women to stay home. Instead, they asked for the state to provide these services to enable women to combine their work and maternal roles more adequately.

⁹³ “Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 3.

⁹⁴ The League also included civic education of women as a goal for the conference, but the actual conference dealt with this issue minimally. See *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1962). Interestingly, Sokół has argued that in the early 1960s, in the midst of rising unemployment, women’s magazines promoted women’s return to the home. I have not found this to be the case for the League. In fact, these years saw a resurgence of women’s work issues for the organization. Sokół, “Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny,” 66.

⁹⁵ “Głosy terenu”; “Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 1-3, esp. 2; “Mówią aktywistki poznańskich kół blokowych,” 37; Helena Dworakowska, “O jaki program chodzi . . .,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 7-8; Discussion in *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*, 55-100; and “Dalsze kierunki i formy działania Ligi Kobiet na obecnym etapie rozwoju ruchu kobiecego w kraju: Referat Prezydium Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1966): 3-29, esp. 12-13. Women also called for longer store hours, better household appliances, one free day for laundry, and assistance from nonworking women.

At the same time, some members argued that the home (and mothers more specifically) should take the lead in raising children over schools and the state.⁹⁶ In their opinion, state-run facilities were no longer adequate in the upbringing of children. Under stalinism, the League had a mistaken understanding that all “social needs were supposed to be satisfied by the state,” claimed Musiałowa.⁹⁷ Socialist ideology in its early years stressed the need to emancipate women from childcare by developing state-run communal facilities, but by the 1950s and 1960s collectivity increasingly gave way to individual family responsibilities.⁹⁸ Women, as mothers, and the home were to take the lead in this important task. These members did not acknowledge the irony of urging women to raise their children and to work outside the home at the same time. These two opposing views of women’s and the state’s responsibilities point to the multilayered discussions that were taking place.

Members for the first time also openly discussed legislation geared specifically to women workers, sometimes stressing biological differences. They called for shorter work weeks for mothers, extended maternity leave, more part-time opportunities, vacations for mothers and children, and onsite gynecologists in workplaces that employed more than four hundred women. They suggested that women’s retirement age be lowered to age fifty-five; that women with children be forbidden to work the night shift; and that women, especially pregnant women, be prohibited from working in certain jobs that were deemed harmful to their health. They opposed laying off female primary breadwinners and demanded that men move out of positions that were more appropriate for women.⁹⁹ Cwikińska, a

⁹⁶ Maria Aszkenazy, “Z czym idziemy na kongres?” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1956): 1-3, esp. 2; “Rozmowy przedkongresowe,” 10; Alicja Musiałowa, “Najważniejsze zadania Ligi Kobiet w pracach przedkongresowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (April 1956): 6-11, esp. 9; and Juzionowa, “Co zrobiła Komisja Wychowania.” At the second national conference, the League placed significant attention on helping families in taking care of and raising their children. J. Juzionowa, “II Zjazd—A pomoc rodzinie w opiece i wychowaniu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 17-28 (31 October 1957): 7-11; and *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*.

⁹⁷ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” 7.

⁹⁸ Wendy Goldman has shown this shift for the Soviet Union in the 1930s in Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*.

⁹⁹ For some examples, see “Aktyw lubelski dyskutuje: Organizacja kobieca czy ruch kobiecy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 34-36; “Rozmowy przedkongresowe”; “Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet”; “Głosy terenu”; “Trzy konferencje”; “W zakładach wytwórczych lamp elektrycznych im. Róży Luksemburg,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 13-15; and “Uchwała: II Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet,” 22-23. On a discussion of night work for women, see also Roman Korolec, “Wzmoczona ochrona pracy kobiet i ich macierzyństwa (zagadnienia prawne),” in *Socjalne i prawne środki ochrony macierzyństwa i rodziny*, ed. Danuta Graniewska (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1976), 167-200, esp. 172-74.

Central Administration member and a factory inspector, argued that when determining what work women can or cannot do, “we must take into consideration a fundamental issue, biology,” an issue that the League did not openly address in the previous era. She advocated the prohibition of certain jobs for women because of their potential to harm mothers (or future mothers).¹⁰⁰ Women’s reproductive role took precedence over their productive one. Recognizing these biological differences, she and other members claimed, would assist women in combining their duties as workers and mothers. It is important to note that at this time the party also promoted protective labor legislation for women and based that legislation on biological differences. In Poland, this form of employment legislation was already on the books as early as 1924 but expanded under communism, especially after 1956.¹⁰¹ The League, party officials, and workers all criticized stalinist-era labor policies, which stressed women’s participation in “new occupations” and overlooked women’s biological makeup.¹⁰²

This new direction did not mean a depreciation of women’s work or a turn to conservative pronatalist policies. In fact, in one regard, members sought to reemphasize women’s work position by strongly insisting on the reinstatement of workplace chapters, which party officials had dissolved in 1953 and which were reestablished in 1957.¹⁰³ League members wanted to characterize the organization as not only for housewives in residential areas but also, and even more important, for

¹⁰⁰ “Dyskusja,” 13. Sociologists during this period likewise addressed the issue of biological differences. See, for example, Jerzy Piotrowski, “Szczególne zagadnienia pracy zawodowej kobiet poza domem,” in *Kobieta współczesna*, 15-43; Maria Królikowska, “Właściwości biologiczne kobiety a praca,” in *ibid.*, 94-108; and Magdalena Sokołowska, *Kobieta pracująca: Socjomedyczna charakterystyka pracy kobiet* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1963). Sokołowska specifically examined how women’s biological makeup affected their work. She went further than most scholars of the period and also incorporated women’s work within the home in her analysis. In contrast to much of the growing sentiment at the time that women were physically capable of doing only certain types of jobs, Sokołowska claimed that, in fact, traditional ideas about men’s and women’s work determined what work women could or could not do to a much greater degree than differences in biology.

¹⁰¹ Korolec, “Wzmoczona ochrona pracy kobiet”; and Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*, 27-28. All Eastern European countries had specific protective labor legislation, which forbid women to engage in certain types of employment. See, for example, Bodorova and Anker, eds., *Working Women in Socialist Countries*.

¹⁰² As sociologist Anna Preiss-Zajdowa has stated, the slogan “Irene Go Home” became popular. Supporters called for a return of married women and mothers to the home. Anna Preiss-Zajdowa, *Zawód a praca kobiet* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związkowe CRZZ, 1967), 5.

¹⁰³ Chapter 5 will include a more detailed discussion of the reinstatement of these chapters.

working women in their places of employment. As such, they did not solely embrace a focus on women's role as mothers, but rather combined the new emphasis with women's worker image.

A few years later, in the early to mid-1960s, discussions shifted slightly to a greater emphasis on the woman worker. League leaders, however, did not simply encourage women to enter the workforce as they had under stalinism, but instead they demonstrated a concern over women's workplace conditions, opportunities, and work status.¹⁰⁴ Members criticized the current inequality and discrimination women faced as workers. They complained about firms' practices of laying off women or being hesitant to hire them because of their potential to take maternity leave and leave for sick children.¹⁰⁵ Traditional assumptions of women as mothers and housewives unjustly precluded them from advancing to the same degree as men, members claimed.¹⁰⁶ Stanisława Legec, Central Administration secretary, blamed women for not wanting to advance due to their multiple responsibilities and criticized the League for not promoting advancement and improvement of women's work skills to a greater degree. It was not solely men's (and employers') traditional assumptions of womanhood that perpetuated this situation, she suggested.¹⁰⁷

Members also frequently addressed women's unemployment in the early 1960s. There were significantly more available positions for men who were looking for jobs than for women. In 1963, for example, for every available position designated for a woman, there were 11.3 registered women

¹⁰⁴ For some examples, see "Solidarna i zorganizowana działalność kobiet – to podstawa korzystania z pełni przysługujących im praw," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1960): 26-34; W. J., "Nad czym pracuję komisja kobieca CRZZ," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January-February 1961): 38-41; K. Mojłowska, "Jak rozwiązuje się w Łodzi problem przedszkoli by przyjść z pomocą pracującej kobiecie," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1963): 42-45; Weronika Jackowska, "Nasze miejsce społecznego działania," *Nasza praca*, no. 5-6 (1966): 3-7; Maria Aszkenazy, "Rozważania o perspektywach," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (May 1961): 12-17; Zofia Pazdej, "Dyskryminacja czy rywalizacja?" *Zwierciadło*, no. 24 (14 June 1959): 2-3; and Anna Dwornicka and Grażyna Pomian, "O miejsce dla Ireny," *Zwierciadło*, no. 38 (20 September 1959): 2-3, 15. Conditions of women's work were also examined in numerous sociological studies. In 1964, for example, a survey conducted on women in upper-level positions showed that women continued to experience difficulties in advancing in the workforce. For results, see Krystyna Wrochno, "Kobiety na kierowniczych stanowiskach o sobie," in *Kobieta współczesna*, 274-89. Ratman-Liwerska likewise mentioned this growing concern. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Discussion in *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*, 55, 65-66, 72.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-66, 72; Alicja Musiałowa, "Rola kobiety w gospodarce narodowej, w umacnianiu rodziny, w socjalistycznym rozwoju kraju," in *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*, 18-33, esp. 23-24; and Stanisława Zawadecka, "Nie zamiast, ale obok . . .," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1964): 1-6, esp. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Stanisława Legec, "Jeszcze o współdziałaniu komisji kobiecej z kołem LK," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1960): 10-14, esp. 12.

seeking a job as compared to 1.6 positions available for every man looking for work.¹⁰⁸ Although members encouraged women to enter some “masculine” fields, they typically differentiated between men’s and women’s work. “Surely girls are not suitable for careers as miners, blacksmiths, metallurgists, or tractor drivers,” but they can train in mechanical, electric, and telecommunications fields, stated Janina Tumińska, a member from Opole.¹⁰⁹ Some firms were also unwilling to employ women in “men’s work.” In a Białystok factory, “due to the firm’s modernization, many women were threatened with layoffs from work.” The president of the League’s workplace chapter at the factory suggested a “reshuffling” of positions. Following her suggestions as to where women could take over men’s positions, there was significant “commotion and objection from the side of foremen, engineers, and even directors, when women were proposed” to work on such “machines as lathes, drills, [and] millers.”¹¹⁰ This particular chapter desired to provide more workplace opportunities for women in areas that had been deemed male, but it also determined which positions were appropriate to women. Not all “men’s” work was acceptable. Besides attempting to “regender” work opportunities, to remedy the situation, the League also formed employment cooperatives, which provided jobs for women.¹¹¹

This decade of “practical activism,” during which the League made reconciling women’s dual roles as mothers and workers central, differed sharply from what preceded it and what followed. Members did not present a unified view of what this “practical activism” looked like. Instead, to some extent, individual members conveyed their own ideas about motherhood and employment. These overlapping and often conflicting views point to the League’s greater openness in this decade and more

¹⁰⁸ Dach, *Praca zawodowa kobiet w Polsce*, 123-24. In the period between 1955 to 1972, according to Dach, the number of available positions for women was always lower than the number of women seeking work, while the opposite was true for men’s work. See her chart on page 126. See also Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*, 124-40; Sokół, “Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny,” 70; and Holzer and Wasilawska-Trenkner, “Poland,” 131.

¹⁰⁹ Janina Tumińska, “Kilka słów o nowej drodze dziewcząt,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1966): 30-34, quotation on 32.

¹¹⁰ Lidia Brzuchacz, “Mit o niekobięcych zawodach,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (June 1961): 65-66, quotation on 65.

¹¹¹ Sokół, *Prasa kobieca*, 138; and Sławomira Walczewska, “Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL,” *Pełnym głosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 25-29, esp. 28. Walczewska has suggested that this was the only respectable initiative that the League ever took. On “regendering” the workplace in the Soviet context, see Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin’s Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

generally an atmosphere of greater openness in Poland. The League was not a radical organization that rebelled against the status quo. Instead, it followed what appeared to be appropriate within Polish society and acceptable to the state. The League followed (rather than led) society and the party in this “moment of catharsis.” And, even within this lively period of the League’s history, the organization did not stray away from spreading official propaganda. Yet, although the League largely remained within the bounds of what the party deemed acceptable throughout most of this decade, it also turned to an activism that focused on women’s needs more than on party needs, showing that at the very least it revealed its ideas and programs of assisting women. The League’s stress on “practical activism” persisted until 1966, when the party decided to reorganize the group, and the League once again became more subordinate to party policy. Women’s criticisms within the workplace were a major reason why party officials decided to abolish workplace chapters in 1966.¹¹² The decade of openness and greater freedom ended abruptly, resulting in a loss of membership and legitimacy, and to some degree a retreat from “practical activism.”

Creating the Socialist Family and Raising Socialist Youth, 1966 to 1981

Following the party’s decision to liquidate workplace chapters in 1966, the League directed its attention almost exclusively to women’s maternal role. The female worker—including the worker-mother—moved to the sidelines. This emphasis persisted until the 1980s, when the League once again stressed the importance of combining women’s roles as workers and mothers. Three issues in the mid- to late-1960s, all tied to party initiatives, point to the reasons for these changes. First, with the shift to a sole focus on residential areas, domestic and maternal issues, not surprisingly, overshadowed women’s employment. Even though the League was supposed to have continued dealing with working women’s problems in residential chapters, it largely left that activism to other workplace groups. Second, during and following widespread student protests in 1968, the organization underscored raising children according to socialist principles, as well as raising parents who then would instill appropriate behavior and attitudes in children. Notably, some members increasingly turned away from equating womanhood

¹¹² This decision and members’ criticisms prior to it as well as their responses following the decree will form a major part of chapter 5. *Nowy etap działalności Ligi Kobiet: Materiały z obrad IV Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet 26-28 czerwca 1966 r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1966).

with motherhood and focusing on women's specific role in families, idealizing instead the modern socialist family based on spousal partnership. This focus on families and children persisted for many years and was connected to the third issue—pronatalism—which emerged in League discussions and party initiatives in the late 1960s and early 1970s, following a period of a steady birthrate decline. The family increasingly became an instrument for state initiatives.¹¹³ Once again, women became an important avenue for the party in promoting its ideology.

“A New Stage of the League of Women's Activism,” the title of the League's fourth national conference proceedings in 1966, during which the directive to dissolve workplace chapters was introduced, demonstrates the group's recognition of the significant meaning of this decision.¹¹⁴ Not only was this “new stage” related to where the League would function, but it also determined the issues that would become central for the organization. The League abruptly shifted from discussions of women's employment and combining family and work responsibilities to almost an exclusive focus on motherhood, family, and domesticity. Since the group was no longer supposed to function in workplaces, not surprisingly women workers became peripheral for the League. This turn to motherhood, therefore, was a direct result of this shift, and not a response to economic and political trends. Pronatalist policies did not begin until the end of the decade and continued into the 1970s.¹¹⁵ Popular women's magazines as well as the party newspaper *Trybuna ludu*, in contrast to the League, advocated a dual image of women as workers and mothers until 1970, further indicating that this shift was related to the dismantling of workplace chapters.¹¹⁶

A sign of the League's new direction was its experiment in forming a new chapter type, Mothers' Circles (*Kola Matek*), which eventually expanded throughout the country. By 1975, 250 such chapters were functioning in Poland. The primary goal of these chapters was to work cooperatively with schools and preschools, focus specifically on children and their needs, and provide mothers with

¹¹³ This focus, like in the Soviet context in the 1930s, stressed assistance of the state rather than individual families. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 105.

¹¹⁴ *Nowy etap działalności Ligi Kobiet*.

¹¹⁵ Basia A. Nowak, “Equality in Difference: Propaganda and the Worker-Mother in Poland, 1966-1975” (M.A. thesis, Ohio State University, 1998); and Markowska, “Rola kobiety w polskiej rodzinie,” 200-201.

¹¹⁶ Sokół, “Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny,” 70; and Nowak, “Equality in Difference.”

information on issues related to child rearing.¹¹⁷ Instead of working women's chapters, the League developed groups specifically for mothers, directly pointing to the increased attention it gave to women's role as mothers.

During and in the years following the 1966 conference, members stressed raising youth more than in the preceding decade. And in 1968, motherhood was intensified in League discourse as the stalinist-era *Matka Socjalistka* reemerged and dominated discussions. Ideas about raising children according to patriotic or socialist principles were never fully eradicated, but they became a focal point for the League at the end of the decade and into the 1970s. In March 1968, students and intellectuals throughout Poland engaged in protests and strikes, demanding political and cultural reform.¹¹⁸ Police forces beat up students and arrested many. Student behavior in the demonstrations was disconcerting to officials, since youth was supposed to be the vanguard of socialism. Training youth in socialist ideology and preparing them to become future leaders and loyal followers was a paramount task for the party.¹¹⁹ Consequently, at the party's fifth national conference, held in 1968, raising youth was an important topic of discussion.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Prezydium ZGLK, "O jednolity front wychowania: Z obrad Prezydium ZGLK," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1971): 16-34, esp. 19, 34; ZGLK, "Udział Ligi Kobiet w socjalistycznym wychowaniu młodzieży w świetle postanowień VII Plenum KC PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1973): 12-37, esp. 27-28; "Obszerne fragmenty: Wypowiedzi delegatek na VI Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet," Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 4-5 (1975): 27-109, esp. 86-88; "Doświadczenia i zadania społecznego ruchu kobiecego w kształtowaniu socjalistycznych przemian w rodzinie," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1975): 26-40; and "Plan pracy koła matek Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1978): 54-55.

¹¹⁸ For a thorough study of events leading up to and resulting from March 1968, see Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec 1968* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991). See also Jerzy Eisler, "March 1968 in Poland," in *1968: The World Transformed*, ed. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1998), 237-251; Karpiński, *Countdown*, chap. 3; and Andrzej Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski, 1939-1989* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996), esp. 362-73. Czechoslovakia likewise experienced large demonstrations, resulting in Soviet military invasion, and leading to intense disillusionment with socialism. On Czechoslovakia, see especially Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Joanna Kochanowicz, *ZMP w terenie: Stalinowska próba modernizacji opornej rzeczywistości* (Warsaw: Trio, 2000), 7. For the Soviet case, see Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹²⁰ ZGLK, "Udział Ligi Kobiet w realizacji uchwał V Zjazdu PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1969): 3-14, esp. 9; and Józefa Adamusowa, "Po V zjeździe PZPR: Założenia programowe działalności KGD i terenowych ośrodków gospodarstwa domowego na 1969 r.," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1969): 1-3.

Following the party's reaction to the rebellion, the League likewise exhibited a growing concern over parental responsibility in raising children according to socialist patriotic values. In a number of instances, the League directly mentioned the crisis and demonstrated its position. "The distressing events in March, the battle with the enemy over the minds and hearts of a segment of the young generation sunk deeply into Polish women's, especially mothers', memories."¹²¹ Hearts and minds of sons and daughters were "poisoned with a foreign ideology" by "antisocialist and antinational instigators."¹²² A resolution from one League city administration portrayed participants in the protests not as initiators but to some degree as victims manipulated by reactionary forces, the "enemy," or those who used them as "tools for their own politicizing and antinational objectives."¹²³ To preclude future antisocialist behavior among youth, it instructed mothers to mold their children into "*spokojne*" (calm or peaceful) citizens.¹²⁴ To police children's behavior more closely and lessen delinquency, the League planned to organize more activities for youth's free time, such as field trips, afterschool programs, dances, readings and discussions, lectures, contests, and sports; and to work more closely with socialist youth organizations.¹²⁵ By keeping busy in League-sponsored programs, youth would supposedly have less access to reactionary forces. Mothers were responsible to encourage their children to participate in these activities.

¹²¹ "Ocena udziału Ligi Kobiet w kampanii przygotowawczej do V zjazdu PZPR: Referat wygłoszony na V Plenum ZGLK w Gdańsku w dniu 13 października 1968 r.," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1968): 4-24, quotation on 6.

¹²² "Aktualne zadania Ligi Kobiet w pracy ideowo-wychowawczej: Referat na IV Plenum ZGLK," *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (1968): 4-27, quotation on 14; and K. Szczepańska, "Odpowiedź organizacji terenowych LK na wydarzenia marcowe," *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (1968): 31-36, quotation on 31-32.

¹²³ Szczepańska, "Odpowiedź organizacji terenowych LK," 32.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹²⁵ For some examples, see ZGLK, "Udział Ligi Kobiet w realizacji uchwał V Zjazdu PZPR," 9-14; "Dyskusja," Proceedings from the Fifth National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 10-11 (1971): 28-106, esp. 53, 67; ZGLK, "Udział Ligi Kobiet w socjalistycznym wychowaniu młodzieży," esp. 26; ZGLK, "O dalsze wzbogacenie treści i form współdziałania Ligi Kobiet ze związkami zawodowymi w miejscu zamieszkania," *Nasza praca*, no. 5-6 (1970): 3-17, esp. 12-15; Zofia Konderska, "Praca dla przyszłości: Zalecenia Prezydium ZGLK po ankiecie w sprawie wychowania w rodzinie," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1968): 43-46; "Ocena udziału Ligi Kobiet," 23; Ewa Zakościelna, "Społeczny front wychowania młodzieży," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1969): 3-5, esp. 4; and Krystyna Augustyniak, "Praca z dziećmi w okresie letnim," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 3 (May-June 1970): 24-25.

This highly politicized depiction of motherhood continued in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and the League underscored its obligation in assisting the state rather than women. Since youth initiated the crisis, youth needed to be controlled, and for youth to be controlled, parents, and especially mothers, had to be educated about their role in raising children. Immediately following the crisis, the League and its leaders frequently turned to “ideological education” of women and their responsibility in inculcating proper behavior in children.¹²⁶ As in the stalinist era, women were to be “enlightened” and “educated” about their important role in socialism. Eugenia Kempara, then League president, stated that “Respecting the norms of co-existence and the principles of public order must be sucked in with a mother’s milk.” Even within the first few weeks or months of a child’s life, a mother was already supposed to instill proper values into her infant.¹²⁷ Parents, and especially mothers, along with the League, were to raise their children according to a “uniform form of upbringing” and to serve as role models as loyal, socialist subjects for youth.¹²⁸ They were to encourage them to join socialist youth organizations, “thus training the young generation to take over from their parents the difficult assignments of further socialist development of the country.”¹²⁹ By the mid-1970s, patriotic and loyal youth was supposedly transformed into disciplined youth, characterized by punctuality at work and school, conscientiousness, reliability, honesty, and a strong work ethic.¹³⁰ Inculcating work discipline was especially important due to frequent strikes and growing discontent among workers, eventually

¹²⁶ “Ideological education” was a central goal for the group throughout its existence, but it intensified in this period.

¹²⁷ Eugenia Kempara, “Referat przewodniczącej Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet tow. Eugenii Kempary,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (1977): 9-15, quotation on 11. Kempara, an attorney, had served in the military from 1952 to 1975 and before becoming the League president in 1975 she was president of the Organization of Military Families. She also was an alternate member to the party’s Central Committee in the 1970s and a member of Parliament. As a young girl, she was active in the Union of Polish Youth. She served as League president from 1979 to 1981. Eugenia Kempara, interview by Felicja Borzyszkowa-Sękowska, “Na czele ruchu kobiecego,” *Być kobietą . . .* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1982), 130-50.

¹²⁸ On the “uniform form of upbringing,” see especially Prezydium ZGLK, “O jednolity front wychowania.”

¹²⁹ Prezydium ZGLK, “Do Zarządów Wojewódzkich, Miejskich, Powiatowych kół i członkiń Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1968): 3-5, quotation on 127.

¹³⁰ Kempara, “Referat przewodniczącej Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 11, Eugenia Kempara, “Po VII Plenum KC PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1977): 3-6, and Eugenia Kempara, “Za rozwój Polski odpowiedzialni jesteśmy wszyscy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1979): 3-6.

leading to the formation of the Solidarity movement. Discipline eventually overshadowed patriotism; shaping hardworking youth who did not shirk workplace responsibilities became the goal.

The League did not turn to motherhood solely because of pressure from the state. Over the years, according to Central Administration secretary Weronika Jackowska, the Central Administration had been trying to direct the organization away from an “all-ism.”¹³¹ Leaders planned to “abandon its [the League’s] work on behalf of children.” The League was “a women’s organization,” Jackowska argued, and specific organizations whose assignment was to deal with children functioned separate from the League. “Attempts at breaking away from this subject matter faded into nothing. Life and its requirements proved to be stronger.” It was “actually mothers—League members” who made children a focal point of the organization’s activism. They refused to end their initiatives dealing with youth.¹³² Jackowska’s statement suggests that although the League promoted motherhood based on state initiatives, it also followed what members on the local level wanted to accomplish. Even though both the state and local members may have wanted an emphasis on youth, the reasons for their desires may have differed, demonstrating the difficulty of separating what the League did because of state pressure and what it did because of pressure from members.

In conjunction with a focus on motherhood, the League also turned to discussions of the modern and socialist family in which both parents were instrumental in raising children and participating in household duties. Because of women’s multiple responsibilities as workers, mothers, activists, and housewives, they should not be solely responsible for family and household obligations, members claimed, breaking from traditional conceptions of women’s and men’s familial responsibilities. In 1968, the organization began a contest—“Family in the Club”—through which it popularized legal issues dealing with the status of women, families, and children.¹³³ In 1973, the

¹³¹ In 1956, for example, members often criticized the League for taking on too many issues. For a discussion of these criticisms, see chapter 5. Jackowska held the position of secretary since 1968.

¹³² Weronika Jackowska, “Programowanie działań organizacji,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1980): 11-29, quotation on 20.

¹³³ Krystyna Zalewska, “Informacja o pracy Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet w okresie od września 1972 do lutego 1973 r.,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1973): 49-60; Grażyna Zaporowska, “‘Rodzina w klubie’: Dorobek siedmiu etapów konkursu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1976): 35-46; Irena Hamerska, “Konkurs ‘Rodzina w klubie’ po dziesięciu etapach,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1980): 43-50; “Rodzina i prawo,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1979): 44-53; and Irena Hamerska, “35 lat działalności ideowo-wychowawczej i kulturalno-oświatowej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1980): 52-59, esp. 57.

League started a reading club for families, which stressed the need for parents to read books on such topics as child rearing, sexuality, hygiene during pregnancy, infant care, and family nutrition.¹³⁴ Members typically combined ideas of the modern socialist family with traditional notions. At the sixth national conference in 1975, a delegate from Kraków, for example, stated: “We know that both sides [meaning women and men] should carry equal responsibility for the family, but women’s role within the family remains ... decisive,” because of her “biological functions” as well as her “emotional structure.” A mother, because of her maternal love, has a specific influence over her children’s “fundamental character traits.”¹³⁵ Parents were supposed to participate equally in their children’s development, yet they had gender-specific roles in fulfilling their responsibility. A call for men to take on more responsibility within the household, even if that responsibility was gender-specific, demonstrates that members exhibited concern over women’s multiple burdens and sought to work for women’s benefit.

In the early 1970s, alongside an emphasis on women’s familial role, the League and the party began to promote pronatalism.¹³⁶ As in many other countries, immediately after World War II Poland’s birthrate increased, but by the mid-1960s, it started to decline gradually.¹³⁷ Between 1950 and 1970, the

¹³⁴ “Drogie czytelniki!” *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1973): 3-5, esp. 3-4; Teresa Elmerych, “Informacja: Na temat współdziałania ogniw i instancji Ligi Kobiet z Towarzystwem Planowania Rodziny, w świetle porozumienia zawartego między zarządami głównymi obu organizacji w lutym 1971 roku,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1977): 4-10, esp. 9; “Klub ‘Ewa’ po 6 latach działania,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1979): 39; Irena Hamerska, “35 lat działalności ideowo-wychowawczej i kulturalno-oświatowej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1980): 52-59, esp. 56; and Teresa Elmerych, “Rola Ligi Kobiet w kształtowaniu i zaspakajaniu potrzeb kulturalnych środowiska,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (1976): 3- 11.

¹³⁵ “Obszerne fragmenty,” 45.

¹³⁶ Markowska, “Rola kobiety w polskiej rodzinie,” 200; Holzer and Wasilawska-Trenkner, “Poland,” 132; and Nowak, “Equality in Difference.”

¹³⁷ Edward Rossett, *Demografia Polski: Reprodukcyjność ludności*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975), 173. See also Mikołaj Latuch, “Demograficzne uwarunkowania potrzeb aktywnej polityki społecznej,” in *Socjalne i prawne środki ochrony macierzyństwa i rodziny*, 19-43; Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon, 1974), chap. 7; Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality,” chap 7; Robert J. McIntyre, “Demographic Policy and Sexual Equality: Value Conflicts and Policy Appraisal in Hungary and Romania,” in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 270-85; and Maria Ciechomska, *Od matriarchatu do feminizmu* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Brana, 1996), 172. Barbara Łobodzińska contends that population policies shifted in Central-Eastern Europe throughout the period depending on “domestic demands for female labor, fluctuating fertility rates, and alternating priorities in national investments.” See Barbara Łobodzińska, “Introduction,” in *Family, Women, and Employment in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Barbara Łobodzińska (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 13. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus and Bernice Madison briefly discuss pronatalist policies in the late sixties in the Soviet Union in Gail

birthrate dropped from 763,000 live births to 546,000 per year.¹³⁸ In a 1975 speech, party secretary Edward Gierek explicitly proclaimed his pronatalist position by declaring that it was the people's responsibility to consider "the nation's future biological growth." Poland's "natural population growth must increase. Our country has not always had to actively conduct demographic politics. Today, it appears to be a necessity. For this reason, it is essential to develop numerous programs geared to help families with children, and especially families with many children."¹³⁹

In celebration of the thirty-fifth anniversary of People's Poland in 1979, Kempara's words are indicative of the pronatalism that was sweeping the state and organization. In her assessment of equality, she maintained that it was women's "social duty . . . to give birth and co-raise the new generation."¹⁴⁰ Motherhood was not a choice but a responsibility. Throughout the decade, the League and its leaders pointed to what the party already had achieved for families and what the League was accomplishing. Working with schools and other child-related institutions, organizing children's activities in schools and communities, creating additional daycare facilities and activity centers, and forming special commissions dealing with families were all organizational goals.¹⁴¹ In the 1950s, the League helped form the *Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa* (Society for Birth Control), which became the *Towarzystwo Planownia Rodziny* (Society for Family Planning) in the early 1970s. This

Warshofsky Lapidus, "Sexual Equality in Soviet Policy: A Developmental Perspective," in *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 11-38; and Bernice Madison, "Social Services for Women: Problems and Priorities," in *ibid.*, 307-32. On comparisons among socialist countries in Europe regarding birthrate decline and pronatalist policies, see Kazimierz Dzieńko, "Procesy demograficzne w Europejskich krajach socjalistycznych a rozwój świadczeń na rzecz rodziny," in *Socjalne i prawne środki ochrony macierzyństwa i rodziny*, 44-83.

¹³⁸ *Rocznik Demograficzny* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1975), 181, 184. Birthrates increased in the early 1970s from 546,000 live births in 1970 to 621,000 in 1974. *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Trybuna Ludu*, 7 March 1975, 3. The changing nature of articles published in the party newspaper *Trybuna ludu* reflect the party's growing concern over the birthrate decline and its focus on pronatalism and maternalism. Starting in January 1973, the newspaper changed its regular column "Women's Issues" into a weekly "Portrait of a Mother." The party paper chose to feature women as mothers, not as women or as workers. Nowak, "Equality in Difference."

¹⁴⁰ Weronika Jackowska, "Spotkanie aktywu kobiecego z okazji 35-lecia PRL," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1979): 3-24, quotation on 7.

¹⁴¹ "Uchwała VI Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet: Główne kierunki działalności społeczno-wychowawczej LK na lata 1975-1978," Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Congress, 97-106, esp. 102-3; and Dział Socjalny ZGLK, "Wytyczne: Do działalności na rzecz prawno-społecznej pomocy rodzinie," *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1976): 67-70.

name change points to the newfound pronatalist focus. The initial name implied contraception and the latter planning families. The League worked closely with this group and in 1971 agreed to make its facilities and clinics available to promote family planning, protection for pregnant and nursing women, preparation for married life, and sex education of youth.¹⁴²

Under Gierek's leadership in the early 1970s, pronatalist policies, which the League supported, expanded.¹⁴³ The legislative transformations included an extension of paid maternity leave from twelve to sixteen weeks for the first child and to eighteen weeks for subsequent children; extension of paid maternity leave to twenty-six weeks for multiple births; implementation of two weeks prenatal maternity leave; expansion of unpaid leave for a sick child; provision of a one time delivery allowance upon birth of child or adoption of child; increase in family allowances; greater enforcement of collecting child support; increase in educational stipends; and expansion of prohibited jobs for women.¹⁴⁴ In 1979, the list of prohibited jobs for women included ninety occupations in eighteen fields,

¹⁴² Zofia Konerska, "Towarzystwo Planowania Rodziny: Naszym sojusznikiem," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1971): 29-30, esp. 30; and "Porozumienie zawarte pomiędzy Zarządem Głównym Ligi Kobiet z Zarządem Głównym Towarzystwa Planowania Rodziny w sprawie dalszego rozwoju treści i form współpracy," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1971): 31-34.

¹⁴³ On specific measures that the state introduced primarily after 1972, see Holzer and Wasilawska-Trenkner, "Poland," 132-33; and Tadeusz Radziński, *Kodeks pracy: Uprawnienia pracującej matki* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, 1976).

¹⁴⁴ Maria Jakubowicz, "Nowe aspekty pracy zawodowej kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1972): 14-22; Eugenia Kempara, "Macierzyństwo i praca," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1972): 3-13; Eugenia Berutowicz, "Nowy Kodeks Pracy," *Nasza praca*, no. 8-9 (1974): 56-66; ZGLK, "Założenia programowe kampanii sprawodawczo-wyborczej w ogniwach i instancji Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 1-2 (1974): 5-26, esp. 8; Zofia Wasilkowska, "Rola, osiągnięcia i zamierzenia sekcji kobiet prawników," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1976): 50-58, esp. 51; "Obszerne fragmenty," esp. 39; Krystyna Zakrewska, "Głosy w dyskusji przedzjazdowej," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1971): 7-11; and Maria Winiarz, "Trudności pomyślne zmiany nadzieje," *Nasza praca*, no. 4-5 (1971): 47-52. Extension of pronatalist policies occurred in most Eastern European countries, particularly Romania, where Nicolae Ceausescu implemented harsh policies, including regular gynecological examinations to determine whether or not a woman was pregnant and strict abortion laws. See Gail Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Mariana Hausleitner, "Women in Romania: Before and after the Collapse," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 53-61; and Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). On birthrate decline and pronatalist policies for Hungary and Bulgaria, see Barnabás Barta, András Klinger, Károly Miltényi, and György Vukovich, "Hungary," in *Working Women in Socialist Countries*, 23-55, esp. 29; and Velitchko Dobrianov, Atanas Atanasov, Pavlina Mihailova, and Maria Dinkova, "Bulgaria," in *ibid.*, 57-91, esp. 67-68. In Bulgaria, the concern over a birthrate decline began a few years earlier than in Poland. On Czechoslovakia, see Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," chap. 7.

with additional prohibitions for pregnant women.¹⁴⁵ All but the prohibitions could be seen as positive changes, particularly for working mothers. Yet, at the same time, some of these changes resulted in women not being taken as seriously as workers, since they potentially would be away from employment for longer stretches of time. Interestingly and surprisingly given Poland's strong ties to the Catholic Church, unlike in other Eastern European countries, pronatalist policies in Poland did not include a restriction of abortion access and rights.¹⁴⁶

The League largely overlooked women's work in discussions during this era of pronatalism and focus on motherhood.¹⁴⁷ League leaders, however, did not strive to push women completely back into the home. In fact, women continued to be expected to fulfill both roles.¹⁴⁸ Zofia Wasilkowska, an attorney and member of the League's Section of Lawyers, for example, stated that there had been discussions brewing over whether women's employment should continue to be advocated or whether they should be encouraged to stay home with their children. She argued that "it is out of the question whatsoever to impede women's growing employment activation." On the contrary, the state should increasingly assist women in combining their two roles as workers and mothers. "On the other side one should create adequate alternatives for these mothers, who would like only to take care of their children. And their home."¹⁴⁹ Rather than advocate a return to the home, Wasilkowska suggested that women should be able to choose. In 1978, Kempara argued that it was more beneficial for a woman to work, but more needed to be accomplished for her to be able to "harmoniously fulfill" her roles as a "mother, worker, and active citizen." To become truly equal to men, she claimed, women also had to

¹⁴⁵ Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, 25.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁴⁷ In contrast to the first half of the decade, Ratman-Liwerska has argued that the League in the Białystok region showed minimal signs of attempts at intervening on behalf of working women. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 156. Sociologists, however, continued to publish studies on women's work. See, for example, Krystyna Wrochno, *Problemy pracy kobiet* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związkowe CRZZ, 1971); Anna Ołędzka, *Kobiet—budżet czasu—praca wielozmianowa* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, 1975); Stefania Dziecielska-Machnikowska, ed., *Kobieta w rozwijającym się społeczeństwie socjalistycznym* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1975); and Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*.

¹⁴⁸ Wieruszewski has stated that in the early 1970s one of the main goals for the League was in fact a strengthening of women's employment position. Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*, 213.

¹⁴⁹ Wasilkowska, "Rola, osiągnięcia i zamierzenia sekcji kobiet prawników," 54.

be employed and engaged in political/social activism.¹⁵⁰ Although the League stressed motherhood, some leaders also continued to show concern over women's work status and equality.

The period after the 1966 directive resembled the propaganda of the stalinist era more than the decade preceding it. The League followed party initiatives and assisted the state in promoting motherhood and pronatalism. Leaders showed minimal signs of concern over women's double burden, although they did not ignore these issues altogether. This deemphasis on women's work was the result not only of the party's growing focus on maternity, but also the League's movement away from workplace chapters. Since women workers were no longer the core of the group's membership and the League was no longer present in workplaces, work issues moved to the sidelines and motherhood and domesticity emerged as more important. Not until the early 1980s did women's double burden once again become a significant point of discussion. The League largely continued to ally itself with the party, but it also became a more lively organization that attempted to assist women to a greater degree than in the 1970s.

Demanding Women Workers' Rights and Protective Legislation in the 1980s

In late 1980, League members once again started to question women's multiple responsibilities. This shift was reminiscent of 1956, when members more openly debated about their activism and direction and were more willing to criticize past initiatives. In the middle of ongoing criticisms of the state, persistent workers' strikes, intensity of the rising Solidarity movement (all of which eventually resulted in the downfall of the communist state in Poland and, arguably, in Eastern Europe),¹⁵¹ members expressed their own dissatisfaction with the status quo within both the

¹⁵⁰ Eugenia Kempara, "Dalsza aktywizacja społeczna kobiet w miejscu zamieszkania—głównym zadaniem Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1978): 3-11, quotation on 5.

¹⁵¹ Accounts of Solidarity and worker protest include Ash, *Polish Revolution*; Ireneusz Krzemiński, *Solidarność: Projekt polskiej demokracji* (Warsaw: Oficyna naukowa, 1997); Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Arista Maria Cirtautas, *The Polish Solidarity Movement: Revolution, Democracy, and Natural Rights* (London: Routledge, 1997); Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), Jadwiga Staniszkis, *The Dynamics of the Breakthrough in Eastern Europe: The Polish Experience*, trans. Chester A. Kisiel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Jacek Kurczewski, *The Resurrection of Rights in Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon

organization and Poland. They exhibited increasing concern about women's rights and criticized activism of the preceding period. Motherhood continued to be important, but women workers took precedence. In 1982, at its national conference, the League officially reinstated workplace chapters, leading to a greater focus on working women's issues.¹⁵²

Ironically, this was also a period when the media, officials, and some workers encouraged women to go back home due to rising unemployment.¹⁵³ In the early 1980s, for instance, women's magazines advocated motherhood to a greater degree than earlier.¹⁵⁴ Some people demanded higher living standards so that women could stay at home.¹⁵⁵ Unlike other periods of unemployment, numerous League members directly opposed this push to the home. Women, they argued, did not want to stay at home with children anymore; they wanted to work for financial reasons, as well as independence, emancipation, and camaraderie. As the editors of the its bulletin stated, many women "are not able to live in a locked up sphere and isolation."¹⁵⁶ Members explicitly commenced on their own path regarding women's work. They underscored women's right to work along with protective legislation that would further enable them to take on employment.

Members exhibited dissatisfaction regarding women's workplace conditions and opportunities, repeatedly complaining about women's lower compensation, lower pay in feminized fields, unequal access to managerial positions, and treatment of women as a reserve labor force, hiring

Press, 1993); William Dan Perdue, *Paradox of Change: The Rise and Fall of Solidarity in the New Poland* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995); Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Dudek and Marszałkowski, *Walki uliczne*, chaps. 7-8.

¹⁵² Each year issue no. 10 of *Nasza praca* was dedicated predominantly to discussions of workplace chapters. On the importance of establishing workplace chapters, see also ZWLK Kraków, "XI Zjazd Wojewódzkiej Ligi Kobiet Polskich w Krakowie, dnia 11 czerwca 1986 r.: Sprawozdanie Zarządu Wojewódzkiego Ligi Kobiet Polskich w Województwie Miejskim Krakowskim za lata 1982-1986," File "Historia Ligi Kobiet," in personal possession of Barbara K; and "Protokół: Z posiedzenia Prezydium ZW LKP Częstochowa w dniu 9 marca 1982 r.," and "Rezolucja: Przedstawicielek kobiet województwa częstochowskiego zebranych na spotkaniu w dniu 8 marca 1982 roku," both in File "Protokoły i posiedzenia plenarnych Zarządu Wojew., 1981-1982," sygn. 23, Archiwum Państwowy w Częstochowie, Częstochowa (hereafter APC).

¹⁵³ Sokół, "Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny," 66.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Renata Siemieńska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," *Women and Politics* 6, no. 4 (1986): 5-35, quotation on 30.

¹⁵⁶ "Od redakcji," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1983): 1-2, quotation on 2.

and firing women based on the state's economic needs. Leaders stressed the need to transform traditional views about womanhood that relegated women to the home.¹⁵⁷ League president Eugenia Kempara, for example, stated strongly:

Unfortunately, a social degradation of women is continually developing. . . . Succeeding economic crises . . . begin with limiting women's employment. During each crisis a so-called concern over the Polish family, deprived of the inconsiderate [working] mother, over the Polish home. . . was intensified. . . . The current social-economic situation once again is creating another temptation. In discussions of establishing economic reforms, and tied with it a reduction in employment, the proposition of laying off women-mothers has already cropped up. No one, however, has thought about the fate of such a family where the mother actually brings in equivalent contributions to the family budget.¹⁵⁸

The talk of "compulsory maternity," she added, would again lead to someone else deciding for women "about their own, personal issues."¹⁵⁹ In these statements, Kempara pointed to both financial necessity and personal choice as reasons for women to work outside the home. State needs, she implied, should be secondary.

Irena Hamerska reiterated Kempara's arguments when she responded to a statement made by a male economics professor who argued that fewer mothers should work and that working mothers had little economic effect on the country. Hamerska irately replied: "Does the professor propose the reduction of women's work, especially mothers, only because they are women—a mother has knowledge about many economic sectors, such as service, commerce, health service, education,

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, "Sprawie awansu zawodowego i społecznego," 13; Eugenia Kempara, "Z myślą o przyszłości," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1981): 1-11, esp. 9; Jadwiga Biedrzycka, "Referat przewodniczącej Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich—Jadwigi Biedrzyckiej," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1986): 41-47, esp. 45; and "LKP—Jaka jest, jaka być powinna: Rzeszowskie refleksje," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1986): 37-40, esp. 39.

¹⁵⁸ Kempara, "O miejsce kobiety w społeczeństwie," 4. See also "Zapytać same kobiety," 27; "Protokół: Z posiedzenia plenum ZWLK Częstochowa odbytego w dniu 28.05.1981 r.," 28 May 1981, File "Protokoły i posiedzenia plenarnych Zarządu Wojew., 1981-1982," sygn. 11, APC; and "Protokół: Z posiedzenia prezydium ZWLK Częstochowa odbytego w dniu 27.02.1981r.," 27 February 1981, File "Protokoły z posiedzenia prezydium Zarządu Wojew., 1981-1982," sygn. 23, APC. In the 1970s and 1980s, Poland experienced repeated price hikes, especially on meat, and constant shortages of food and other necessities. People, and especially women, had to stand in long lines, often to find that there was nothing left on store shelves once it was their turn to purchase something, and to buy certain goods on rations. In the middle of this economic crisis, unemployment began to rise, often leading to discussions of women's "proper" position in society.

¹⁵⁹ Eugenia Kempara, "Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1982): 6-21, quotation on 14. See also interview of Irena Sztachelska and Jadwiga Biedrzycka by Elżbieta Karwacka, "Wczoraj i dziś," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1985): 3-12; and "Protokół: Z posiedzenia Plenum ZWLK Częstochowa odbytego w dniu 28.05.1981 r."

culture.” Without women’s input in the economy, she continued, production, sales, healing, education, and so on would stop. “Where after all is equality, allowing women to decide for themselves about their own careers?”¹⁶⁰ Although most of the types of work sectors that she listed were in traditionally female sectors, this heated dialogue between Hamerska and the professor demonstrated the intensity of some members’ views on women’s choice to work outside the home and their contribution to the economy as workers. Furthermore, the professor’s comments point to efforts at reappropriating traditional gender roles in which men work outside the home supporting their families, while women stay at home raising children and performing domestic work.¹⁶¹

The League did not completely ignore motherhood. Especially in the mid-to late 1980s, the group once again stressed the family’s, and more specifically mothers’, important role in shaping loyal, patriotic youth, who possessed solid socialist values, and in creating a “uniform system of upbringing.” Foreign elements influenced youth in the latest crises, and it was parents’, and especially mothers’, responsibility to inculcate traditional national values in children. As in previous years, mothers were encouraged to work with schools, especially through the mothers’ chapters and parents’ committees.¹⁶² Discussions related to a politicized motherhood, however, were limited as compared to the previous period.

¹⁶⁰ “Zapytać same kobiety,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1981): 27-30, quotation on 28. Her reply was published in *Trybuna ludu*.

¹⁶¹ As Siemieńska has argues, “Although the traditional model was always favored by a majority of society, the early eighties marked a return to the traditional, albeit slightly modified model.” Siemieńska, “Women and Social Movements,” 32. See also Siemieńska, *Płeć, zawód, polityka*, 237-38.

¹⁶² See, for example, “Materiały i dokumenty: Jesteśmy za porozumieniem,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1982): 2-7; “Kierunki działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich w 1984 roku,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1984): 4-7; “Co o Lidze Kobiet Polskich wiedzieć powinnyśmy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1984): 3-6, esp. 5; Barbara Wawrzyniak, “Działalność LKP w zakresie pomocy rodzinie w wypełnianiu przez nią funkcji wychowawczych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1984): 1-7; Hanna Konopińska, “Referat Prezydium ZG LKP wygłoszony na Plenum 18 września 1984 roku przez sekretarz Hannę Konopińską,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1984): 8-12; “Ocena realizacji uchwały Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich w sprawie upowszechniania kultury pedagogicznej wśród rodziców,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1986): 5-8; “Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich z dnia 18 września 1984,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1984): 13; “Wychowanie ważna sprawa,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1986): 51-52; Elżbieta Karwacka (interviewer), “Rozmowa z Marią Norin,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1983): 10-12; “Program działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich na lata 1986-1990 przyjęty na IX Krajowym Zjeździe,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1986): 17-24, esp. 19; Rola kół matek i nauczycielek w jednolitym systemie wychowania,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1982): 2-3; and Maria Trybulska, “Miejsce i rola Ligi Kobiet Polskich w zakładzie pracy, osiedlu, środowisku,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1987): 19-24, esp. 21-22.

Instead, to a greater degree, numerous members focused on connections between motherhood and work in terms of legislation rather than propaganda. While calling for the enforcement of equal treatment in the workforce, they also continued to highlight women's differences from men due primarily to women's childbearing capacity. They stressed traditional perceptions of women as mothers, or as potential mothers, and maintained that gendered legislation would allow women to combine work and home responsibilities more adequately. Most changes that they advocated were extensions of previous legislation, especially from the 1970s, including an extension of maternity leave, increase in family allowances, and early retirement for women (after thirty years of work but at any age).¹⁶³

Protective legislation geared specifically to women, and especially pregnant women, likewise figured into discussions. Night work for women was an issue that members frequently addressed. The night shift had already been prohibited for pregnant women, but some members proposed that it be forbidden to women with young children, single mothers, and women who were close to retirement.¹⁶⁴ Members showed growing concern over a lack of enforcement of legislation that was already on the books.¹⁶⁵ At a symposium entitled "Protection of Women's Work," held in May 1983, attendees

¹⁶³ For some examples, see "Ocena realizacji uchwały Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich w sprawie upowszechniania kultury pedagogicznej wśród rodziców," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1986): 5-8; "Wychowanie ważna sprawa," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1986): 51-52; Barbara Błachowska, "Uwagi do projektu: część I," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1981): 36-43, esp. 39-40; Barbara Błachowska, "Prawo pracy okresu stanu wojennego (2)," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1982): 23-30, esp. 25; "Omówienie dyskusji," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1984): 78-87, esp. 78; Elżbieta Gorajewska-Mieciek, "Stanowisko Zarządu Głównego LKP w sprawie funkcjonowania systemu zasiłków wychowawczych," *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1982): 8-11; Gertruda Uścińska, "Sytuacja społeczno-prawna kobiet pracujących w Polsce (1)," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1988): 22-25; "Wnioski w zakresie polityki społecznej"; Halina Bielenia, "O emeryturach," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1981): 24-27; and "Protokół: Z posiedzenia Plenum ZWLK Częstochowa odbytego w dniu 28.05.1981 r."

¹⁶⁴ "Podstawowe kierunki działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich dotyczące społeczno-zawodowej roli kobiet w zakładzie pracy," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1983): 7-8, esp. 8; "Statut: Podstawa prawna działalności Ligi Kobiet Polskich," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1983): 9-13, esp. 9; Barbara Błachowska, "Propozycje zmian przepisów kodeksu pracy w zakresie ochrony pracy kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1984): 32-43, esp. 35; and "Warunki pracy kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1983): 9-12, esp. 12. On changing policies regarding night work, see Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*, 45-47. Interestingly, currently the League supports night work for women, arguing that this protective legislation results in inequality. Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, interview by author, 7 March 2000, Warsaw; and Bożena N., interview by author, 17 March 2000, Warsaw.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, "Kolejne odpowiedzi," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1984): 8-10; Helena Gadomska, "Przepisy prawne a stan faktyczny opieki zdrowotnej nad pracującą kobietą ciężarną," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1984): 71-77; Barbara Barańska, "Praca chroniona kobiet w ciąży w przemyśle lekkim," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1984): 48-49; "Problemy kobiet są naszymi problemami," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1983): 48-50; "Program działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich na lata 1986-1990 przyjęty na IX Krajowym

complained that thousands of women worked under unsafe and unhygienic conditions and lifted more than allowable weight limits for women, affecting working women's health. "This negligence . . . cannot be tolerated," they stressed.¹⁶⁶ Women needed specific legislation, a couple of authors maintained, not only because mothers were responsible for raising children, but also because women's "psychophysical characteristics" differed from men's.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, pregnant women working in certain jobs were more likely to miscarry, and vibration of machinery supposedly caused "deformation, which does not allow these women to become mothers."¹⁶⁸ These members and "experts" advocated a policing of women's work to ensure that employers heeded protective labor legislation. Yet employers often interpreted legislation geared specifically to women as proof of women's weaker reliability and permanence in the workforce, giving them further reason to treat women as a reserve labor force.

Zofia Sokół has argued that between 1981 and 1990 women's magazines promoted an extension of maternity leave, as well as women's early retirement, because few jobs were available for women. These so-called privileges and protective legislation reinforced the use of women as a reserve labor force and emphasized women's secondary role as workers.¹⁶⁹ The League's promotion of legislative changes that stressed women's maternal role could be interpreted similarly, but as stated above, members also emphasized the need to treat women as equal participants in the workforce. In addition, with regard to maternity leave policy and policy for leave for a sick child, some members strongly advocated changing the wording from maternal to parental, indicating that they wanted to see equal treatment not only on the shop floor but also in terms of who was allowed to stay home and raise children. They argued that parents, not the state, should decide which parent takes advantage of these policies and claimed that prohibiting fathers from taking such leave "is contradictory with

Zjeździe," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1986): 17-24, esp. 18-19; "Dyskusja na IX Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet Polskich," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1987): 3-17, esp. 4; "Stanowisko Ligi Kobiet Polskich w sprawie działalności oddziałów pracy chronionej," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1988): 8-10; and "Awans kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1987): 57-59.

¹⁶⁶ "Warunki pracy kobiet," 11.

¹⁶⁷ Tadeusz Szymanek, "Ochrona pracy kobiet w orzecznictwie sądu najwyższego," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1984): 12-20, quotation on 12; and Uścińska, "Sytuacja społeczno-prawna kobiet pracujących," 22.

¹⁶⁸ "Omówienie dyskusji," 82. See also Barańska, "Praca chroniona kobiet w ciąży"; and "Warunki pracy kobiet," 10-11.

¹⁶⁹ Sokół, "Wzór osobowy kobiety i model rodziny," 84.

constitutional principles of sexual equality and identical distribution of parental responsibilities on both spouses.” The idea presented by a male party leader at a League meeting that allowing men to take this leave “is impossible considering men’s work discipline and the character of their work . . . was met with well-founded criticism from . . . members.” Members contended that his suggestion that women’s work was less important and required less discipline than men’s was false.¹⁷⁰ Members advocated motherhood and gender-specific legislation, and even in such typically gendered policy as maternity leave, they called for equal responsibility of both parents, once again pointing to the multilayered views expressed.

The League’s depiction of women’s roles within the family was also not clear-cut. At once, members stressed women’s specific role as mothers as well as the need to create partnership in which both parents took on household responsibilities and raising children in an effort to alleviate some of women’s multiple burdens.¹⁷¹ At a seminar dedicated to “Family—partnership—upbringing,” held in 1987, League president Jadwiga Biedrzycka’s speech conveyed both.¹⁷² Following statements about the importance of familial partnership, she stated that she had hoped that the session would lead to more studies of the family, including women’s specific role within it.¹⁷³ A family based on partnership did not necessarily mean equal roles. Women continued to have specific responsibilities within the family, even though men were to take on more to assist their wives. Furthermore, the League demonstrated its focus on women’s specific familial and domestic roles especially in the types of courses it offered

¹⁷⁰ “Wnioski w zakresie polityki społecznej,” 15-16. See also “Liga Kobiet domaga się”; and Błachowska, “Uwagi do projektu: część I.” Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa likewise stated that the issue of parental leave was important during this period. Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, interview by author, Kraków, 9 June 2000.

¹⁷¹ “Program działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich na lata 1986-1990,” 19; Biedrzycka, “Referat przewodniczącej Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich,” 43-44; “Dyskusja na IX Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet Polskich,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1987): 3-17, esp. 8-9; Alicja Zdybel, “Zadania oświatowe i badawcze KGD w aktualnej sytuacji społeczno-gospodarczej kraju,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1988): 1-3.

¹⁷² Biedrzycka, an attorney, became League president in 1981. She previously had been the president of the city of Włocławek. She also served as vice marshall in Parliament and in 1986 became a member of the party’s Central Committee. *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1979): 28; Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1982): 62-63; and *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1986): 1.

¹⁷³ “Rodzina—partnerstwo—wychowanie,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1987): 1-3, esp. 3. On the need for partnership within families, see also Graniewska, *Awans zawodowy kobiet*, 6.

through its Home Economics Committee: courses on raising children, health and hygiene of mothers and children, infant care, cooking, cleaning, and so on.

In the 1980s, the League continued to promote propaganda and followed the party line, although to a much lesser extent than in the previous period. Rather than emphasizing state needs, members more typically moved against official sentiment and stressed the need to start treating women as equal participants in the national economy. Simultaneously, they stressed women's differences by arguing that gender-specific legislation would assist women, not the state, in alleviating their multiple responsibilities. This special legislation, however, also could be interpreted as leading to a persistent view of women as secondary workers. During the 1980s crises, the League may have been able to be more independent than in other periods, because party officials had greater problems to address than women's issues: workers were striking, the Solidarity movement was growing exponentially, and discontent among the populace was mounting. Even so, the organization, while following some party directives and initiatives, also created its own direction of activism that underscored women's needs. Interestingly, at the same time, women activists in Solidarity and the underground movement largely ignored women's issues, often arguing that women had reached emancipation. Instead, they focused their activism on issues that were deemed important for all, regardless of sex.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

The League's discourse and activism regarding women as mothers and workers was both complex and changing, indicating that members did not convey a unified and simple ideology and plans regarding women's roles. In most periods, the League followed party dictates and the acceptable road for women. Depending on the ebbs and flows of the economy and party-state needs, at times the League advocated women's participation in the workforce, while at others it encouraged women to remain in the home. The League was not a radical organization that initiated change; it rather typically conformed to what the party deemed acceptable. Even so, at certain moments of its history, particularly 1956 to 1966 and in the 1980s, members likewise conveyed a sense of assisting women, especially

¹⁷⁴ See Ewa Kondratowicz, *Szminka na sztandarze: Kobiety Solidarności, 1980-1989, rozmowy* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2001); Belinda Brown, *The Private Revolution: Women in the Polish*

working mothers, in combining their responsibilities. In these periods, the organization and its members simultaneously followed the party line and promoted women's issues, as the next chapter will show in greater detail. By stressing only one aspect of the League's history as a follower of the party, we overlook the complexity of the group's discourse and actions regarding women's dual responsibilities as mothers and workers.

CHAPTER 4

HELPING WOMEN: DOMESTICITY, INTERVENTION, AND LEISURE

<i>Od wielu lat pracują babeczki¹</i>	For many years women have worked
<i>W szeregach Ligi Kobiet zrzeszone.</i>	United as members of the League of Women.
<i>Siły narodu umacniają,</i>	The power of the nation they strengthen,
<i>Bogactwa jego pomnażają,</i>	Its wealth they increase,
<i>Rodzinie i dzieciom pomagają,</i>	Families and children they help,
<i>Czynny społeczne ciągle machają,</i>	Social acts endlessly they dispatch,
<i>W wysiłkach nie zastąpione.²</i>	In effort they are not superseded.

This first verse of a poem by Maria Paczosa expresses the general direction of League activism. The organization brought women together to assist the state by strengthening the nation and increasing its wealth and to aid families and children with their everyday needs through its social acts.³ Although the League undoubtedly was connected to the party and often worked for the state's benefit, it also simultaneously provided something of value to both women in general and its rank-and-file members, many of whom were not affiliated with the party and often had little interest in politics. In this chapter, I examine some of the programs and actions through which the League did, in fact, try to help women, and show how the organization functioned on the ground. Within the state, the League carved out for itself a semi-autonomous space, one that functioned for both the official state and women.

I begin with a detailed examination of one specific League initiative—the *Komitet do spraw Gospodarstwa Domowego* (Committee for Home Economics Affairs)—because of its centrality to League activism. I translate *gospodarstwo domowe* as home economics, but the term can be translated

¹ *Babeczki* is a diminutive term for *baby*, a term that can mean women, a pejorative for women, or peasant women. In this case, it means women.

² “Kronika 1975-1976 (Krowodrza),” in personal possession of Barbara K.

³ Although members often stressed that the organization assisted families, my focus here is mostly on how it helped women specifically.

in other ways. *Gospodarstwo domowe* can also mean housekeeping, and *domowe* can refer to domestic. I use home economics since what the League did through these programs most closely resembled what we think of as home economics courses in the United States. Formed in 1957 in an effort to assist women in alleviating their multiple responsibilities, the Committee was and continues to be the most well-known program that the League developed during the communist period.⁴ I then turn to the League's role as an intermediary between women and the state, and the League's own initiatives in addressing women's problems, particularly during the 1980s crises. Finally, an analysis of the League as a social organization, providing women who attended meetings, lectures, and courses with a female social space, is followed by a discussion of the meaning that individual members gave to their participation in the group.

Through these examples, I demonstrate that an organization functioning within and supported by a communist party system in many cases could and did establish itself as more than an entity fully manipulated by that system and could and did serve more than just the needs and desires of the state. The typical negative perceptions of communist-era women's organizations reflect only one component of these groups, overlooking the multiple roles that these groups played and the complicated relationships that they had with both the state and with women. Looking beyond the League's official rhetoric and propaganda as well as its party affiliation, signs of a complex and lively organization emerge.

Developing a New Program: Committee for Home Economics Affairs

As we have seen, prior to and during the League's second national conference held in 1957, members underscored the need to assist women in their responsibilities as housewives, mothers, and workers (in other words, with women's so-called double burden) and called for a new focus on "practical activism," which centered on women's rather than party needs in contrast to the preceding

⁴ Typically, if today one asks someone in the general population what the League had done during the communist period, the answer is that it offered such courses.

stalinist period.⁵ Rather than emphasize heavy industry and women's employment in "new occupations," they called for this shift. Through these discussions, members determined that the organization needed to strengthen its activism on issues related to the household. "Relieving women from the hardest household tasks" is a "burning issue," a member writing for *Nasza praca* maintained. "We must start 'from the kitchen,' from home economics, since it precisely oppresses working women, consumes her strength and energy, weakens and impoverishes women's lives, [and] restrains her cultural development."⁶ To relieve this "burning issue" by starting "'from the kitchen,'" members decided to form the national Home Economics Committee. In 1958, under the Committee's guidance, chapters also began to organize *ośrodki* and *poradnie gospodarstwa domowego* (home economics centers and clinics or information bureaus) throughout Poland, both on the provincial level and more locally.⁷ The Home Economics Committee, centers, and clinics quickly became the most well known and visible forms of League activism.

The decision to develop a home economics program was based on what League members, rather than party officials, recognized as women's everyday needs. Discussions on how the programs should function took place. One member, Jadwiga Promińska Raabe, for example, suggested that centers could run stores that sold used goods, function as a place where people exchanged goods and services, sell items made by women who worked from the home, and serve as a place of consultation for these women. Although none of Raabe's proposals ended up as central to centers, her ideas suggest

⁵ Alicja Musiałowa, "Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej wygłoszony na II Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet," in *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet (materiały): Warszawa 11-13 lipiec 1957 r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1957), 9.

⁶ "Bliżej codziennego życia kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 3-5, quotation on 4. See also Maria Aszkenazy, "Z czym idziemy na kongres?" *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1956): 1-3, esp. 2.

⁷ The establishment of these centers and clinics was somewhat haphazard. The League never reached its goal of establishing them in all provinces. By 1963, the League had 10 centers and 42 clinics, and in 1986, 64 such institutions functioned. "Nasze zadania na rok 1963 o działalności Komitetu do spraw Gospodarstwa Domowego," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1963): 1-7, esp. 4; and Alicja Zdybel, "Edukacja ekonomiczna w działalności Ligi Kobiet Polskich," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1986): 3-10, esp. 8-9. In some regions these centers and clinics were very vibrant, while in others they were constantly on the verge of falling apart, often due to limited finances. On the fluctuation of these centers and clinics, see, for example, Alicja Zdybel, "Komitet Gospodarstwa Domowego Ligi Kobiet dla rodziny," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1980): 75-82, esp. 81; "Aktualne kierunki działania placówek terenowych KGD," *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1982): 10-11; Alicja Zdybel, "Poradnictwo w dziedzinie gospodarstwa domowego," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1983): 39-43, esp. 39; and Bożena Nowak, "Poradnictwo w dziedzinie gospodarstwa domowego," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1987): 39-42, esp. 39. Centers usually had kitchen facilities equipped with all sorts of kitchen gadgets and appliances, as well as sewing machines and other items needed for courses.

that members participated in discussions on how home economics programs should function.⁸ The Central Administration did not simply come up with a definitive plan for all chapters to follow. The League's Warsaw city administration even developed a center before national leaders urged chapters throughout Poland to form such facilities, demonstrating that local chapters sometimes initiated programs prior to the national administration.⁹

An emphasis on home economics was by no means new to the League in the late 1950s. In fact, in the immediate postwar period and during the early stalinist years, the League offered courses through its Home Economics Institute as a means to teach women domesticity, ease women's housework, and especially provide women with work skills in traditionally female areas of employment.¹⁰ Following the devastating Second World War in which many men lost their lives, women, often for the first time, had to enter the workforce as primary breadwinners for their families. Home economics courses provided these women with the opportunity to develop work skills in such feminized fields as cooking and baking; sewing; and making toys, hats, slippers, and baskets.¹¹ The Institute ceased to function formally in 1951, probably due to the party's discomfort with the organization's focus on domesticity rather than politics and propaganda.¹² Courses under stalinism increasingly incorporated politics; instructors were expected not only to convey information about

⁸ Jadwiga Promińska Raabe, "W sprawie wojewódzkich ośrodków gospodarstwa domowego," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 8 (October 1958): 20-22.

⁹ Helena Spalona, "Dlaczego i jak organizować wojewódzkie ośrodki gospodarstwa domowego," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 4 (June 1958): 1-3.

¹⁰ On these early courses, see Irena Sztachelska, *Cele, zadania i osiągnięcia Ligi Kobiet: Drukowane na prawach rękopisu* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1947), 18; "Sprawozdanie: Z działalności Zarządu Powiatowego Ligi Kobiet Nowa Huta od dnia 15 sierpnia 1950 roku," 2 January 1951, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiet – KW Kraków," sygn. 237/XV-15, AAN; "Analiza pracy Ligi Kobiet," 28 February 1951, File "KC PZPR Wydział Kobiet – KW Łódź," sygn. 237/XV-17, AAN; and Józefa Adamusowa, interview by Irena Hamerska, "Trochę historii o działalności KGD i jego poprzedników," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1983): 1-12, esp. 3-4.

¹¹ SOLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Głównego Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet za pierwsze półrocze 1947 r.* (Warsaw: ZG SOLK, 1947), 25-28, File "Liga Kobiet, 1945-1950," sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN; Irena Czech, "Szkolimy zawodowo," *Kobieta*, no. 3 (November 1947): 3-4; and Aniela Daszewska, "Polus już nie straszy," *Kobieta*, no. 4 (November 1947): 10.

¹² In 1949, a party leader in Kraków, Rybicki, for example, stated that the League must remember that the group is not apolitical. "In their work on organizing occupational and domestic courses, League members often forget that this work is not the ultimate goal of the League of Women." M. Rybicki, "Protokół z posiedzenia Egzekutywy KW z dnia 29 grudnia 1949 r.," File "Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR w Krakowie Egzekutywa, 27 XII 1948—31 XII 1949," sygn. PZPR KW Kr 188, APK.

home economics but also to provide political information to attendees in an effort to spread socialist propaganda.¹³ The League also participated in trade unions' *Komisja do spraw odciążenia kobiet od pracy w gospodarstwie domowym* (Commission to Relieve Women from Household Work) between 1948 and 1949, a commission set up to offer courses in home economics for working women, and its cooperatives set up courses on nutrition, provided laundry services, and trained domestic servants.¹⁴

During the interwar period, a number of women's organizations provided similar home economics initiatives. Members of various women's groups, for example, became quite interested in "the rationalization of the household" and development of kitchen appliances, as well as in saving time, energy, and money. Formed in 1930, *Związek Pań Domu* (Union of Ladies of the Home) ran home economics courses and demonstrations in cooking and canning, held demonstrations on new household appliances, advocated the teaching of home economics in primary and secondary schools, and published its own journal—"Pani Domu" (Lady of the Home). Also formed in 1930 was the *Instytut Gospodarstwa Domowego* (Home Economics Institute), whose task was to develop, gather, and spread information about home economics. A few women's organizations ran courses specifically for training domestic servants, while others focused on educating rural women.¹⁵ Interwar women's cooperatives, including the *Liga Kooperatystek w Polsce* (League of Women Cooperatives in Poland, formed in 1935), likewise offered practical knowledge regarding domesticity in courses and demonstrations, provided household implements for communal use, and organized communal shopping. The goal of these courses was to assist women in "develop[ing] characteristics of a good housewife."¹⁶ Although League sources do not indicate a direct connection to these earlier initiatives, it is quite possible that

¹³ "Analiza pracy Ligi Kobiet."

¹⁴ Malgorzata Fidelis, personal correspondence, February 2004; and Malgorzata Fidelis, "Reinventing Gender: Women Industrial Workers and the State in Postwar Poland, 1945-1956" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, in process), chap. 1.

¹⁵ Zofia Chyra-Rolicz, "Kobiety a unowocześnianie i uspołecznianie gospodarstw domowych w Polsce międzywojennej," in *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego, wiek XIX i XX*, ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1997), 249-64. See also Dobrochna Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej: Dylematy środowisk kobiecych* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonica," 2001).

¹⁶ Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej*, 48-49, quotation on 44.

the League formed some of its home economics programs based on knowledge of (and maybe in some cases, actual experience in) these earlier organizations.

The Home Economics Committee served three main purposes: it conducted research, it provided instruction and spread information through courses and publications, and it oversaw the work of regional centers and clinics.¹⁷ As a research center, it conducted qualitative tests and surveys on such household products as new sewing machines, washers, and laundry detergents, and tested out new recipes for women to use within individual households. Women conducted some of these tests in their private homes, while other tests were completed at the centers. The supposed goal of these tests and surveys was to ensure that the best quality products landed on the market and were available for purchase by the average consumer, yet it is unclear how available these products actually were on the market. It is possible that this testing was also a way in which the League promoted the use of items produced by Eastern European and Soviet state-run facilities.

By conducting tests and surveys on household goods, the Committee advocated individual consumerism within a communist society, blurring the line between the common dichotomous conceptions of the capitalist West and the Eastern bloc, often characterized in opposition to consumption and individualism. By promoting the purchase of products for personal use and the creation of technologically advanced household goods, the League participated in shaping consumerist women and families.¹⁸ Especially in the 1970s, communist party-states retreated from strict anti-capitalist ideology and overtly supported personal consumerism. Consumer culture functioned alongside socialism rather than in opposition to it

¹⁷ On its goals, see, for example, Nowak, "Poradnictwo w dziedzinie gospodarstwa domowego," 39; "O pracy Komitetu do spraw Gospodarstwa Domowego"; "Komitet do spraw Gospodarstwa domowego," *Zwierciadło*, no. 1 (19 May 1957): 2; and Adamusowa, interview by Hamerska, "Trochę historii o działalności KGD," 4-5.

¹⁸ My findings for the League are in line with recent studies on consumerism within Eastern Europe. Patrick Hyder Patterson, "Communism Consumed: The Culture of the Market and Everyday Life in Yugoslavia, Hungary, and the German Democratic Republic" (paper presented at the Sixteenth Annual Junior Scholars' Training Seminar, Queenstown, Md., August 2003); and David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, "Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe," in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 1-24. Barbara Einhorn likewise has shown that individual consumerism functioned within the socialist state. Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993), 33.

Training instructors in home economics was a primary initiative of the Committee. Courses for instructors ranged from yearlong sessions and correspondence courses to short two-to-three hour retraining sessions and brief seminars.¹⁹ Only students with a secondary education were eligible to participate. With the urging of the Committee, in 1969 the state formally recognized home economics instructor as an occupation.²⁰ These courses provided women, many of whom were nonworking and young, with skills to work outside the home. Employment as home economics instructors also gave some women the opportunity to work part-time, thereby allowing them to combine work and family more easily. Jadwiga Włodarczyk, a home economics instructor, stated that although teaching these courses was not easy, it was exciting. She had always wanted to engage in this type of work, and she was getting paid for it.²¹ Ironically, the League trained women to work outside the home by teaching other women how to be good housekeepers.

In addition to courses, instructors acquired written information through a bi-monthly journal, *Gospodarstwo domowe* (Home economics), published by the Committee and geared specifically toward home economics teachers. This publication presented descriptions of its initiatives; guidance on how to run courses, lectures, demonstrations, and exhibits; examples of topics to be addressed; and information about new household products.²² The Committee likewise published brochures on a variety of topics from nourishment to laundry and cosmetics, all of which were made available not only to instructors but also the general public.

Once trained, instructors taught free courses, presented lectures, and ran demonstrations in such locations as schools, cooperatives, workplaces, stores, and local League and Circles of Rural

¹⁹ On training instructors through the Committee, for some examples, see Zdybel, "Komitet Gospodarstwa Domowego Ligi Kobiet dla rodziny," 77; "Seminaria dla instruktorek gospodarstwa domowego," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1983): 22-24; Ewa Zakościelna, "O kształceniu zawodowym instruktorek gospodarstwa domowego," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1960): 21-25; "Organizacja działalności oświatowej w zakresie gospodarstwa domowego," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1960): 31-42; "Nie wystarczy biały fartuch," *Zwierciadło*, no. 15 (13 April 1958): 14; and "Na wiedzę instruktorek gospodarstwa domowego czeka wiele kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1982): 15-17.

²⁰ Roman Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn w Polsce Ludowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1975), 212.

²¹ Jadwiga Włodarczyk, "Zawsze na pierwszej linii," in *Pamiętniki kobiet: biografie trzydziestolecia*, ed. Barbara Chlabicz, Teresa Czaputowicz, and Krystyna Glinka-Olechonicz (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1977), 347-64. This edited collection includes personal sketches by women who entered a contest entitled "Biographies on the Thirtieth Anniversary: Who Am I?" in 1973.

²² The Committee also published numerous articles on its activities in *Nasza praca*.

Housewives' chapter offices as well as home economics clinics and centers.²³ They also offered guidance and advice via phone and mail.²⁴ Instructors either worked full-time, teaching on-going courses, or on an as-needed basis.²⁵ Each individual chapter, not the national League body, decided on the types of courses and information it wanted based on the needs and desires of local women. Young girls, often from rural areas, who had few opportunities after primary school were typical students of the longer courses, while short one- to two-hour sessions most frequently saw League members as attendees. Topics that teachers addressed were diverse, but most dealt with traditionally female responsibilities—food preparation, laundry, household cleanliness, health and hygiene, cosmetics and hairstyling, sewing, management of a family budget, and party planning (especially a nonalcoholic party) were all common topics.²⁶

Socialist ideology in its early years stressed the need to emancipate women from household burdens through collective social services, such as communal laundry and eating facilities, but in Poland, communal services never gained much popularity.²⁷ Even within the Soviet Union by the 1930s ideology based on collectivity and the withering away of the family was replaced by a

²³ In 1960, the League maintained that it ran about twelve thousand courses/lectures annually, with about two hundred thousand women attendees. Chances are, though, that some women attended more than one course annually. Stanisława Zawadecka, "Drogie Koleżanki!" *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1960): 1-5, esp. 1.

²⁴ In 1980, Zdybel, vice-director of the Committee, stated that the League provided individual guidance to four thousand inquiries annually. Zdybel, "Komitet Gospodarstwa Domowego Ligi Kobiet dla rodziny," 82.

²⁵ In the Białystok province, three instructors worked full-time in the home economics centers and between ten and twenty as needed in the late 1970s. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet (na przykładzie badań na Białostoczyźnie)* (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW w Białymstoku, 1984), 158.

²⁶ In the early 1980s, there was significant discussion in women's magazines about the need for a women's organization. One such article included voices of women who expressed opposition to the League. Halina Siwiec, a textile worker from Łódź, for example, stated that she had heard about these courses for women, but she believed that these were skills that a mother, not a women's organization, should teach her daughter. Elżbieta Banasiak and Janina Ratyńska, "Tyle jeszcze trzeba zrobić . . .," *Przyjaciółka*, no. 9 (1 March 1981): 10.

²⁷ Helena Strzezińska, "Czas wolny rodzin pracowniczych i ich potrzeby w zakresie rozwoju usług," in *Socjalne i prawne środki ochrony macierzyństwa i rodziny* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1976), 336-62.

strengthening of the family, marked partly by individual responsibility for household tasks.²⁸ In accordance with the widespread sentiment of Poles and a general retreat from collectivity in socialism, the League likewise emphasized the individual household in its home economics programs. Cooking, sewing, and washing for the individual family replaced alleviating burdens through the use of communal services.²⁹ Women, rather than the state, were expected to provide these services for their families. Particularly after stalinism, not only the League but also the state increasingly embraced traditional ideas about proper gender roles, including roles related to running a household. The League and the state moved away from revolutionary ideas of socialist feminism in the early years to a focus on traditional roles for women and men.

Although throughout the organization's history some members advocated equality between the sexes, especially stressing greater workplace opportunities and advancement for women, home economics programs were highly gendered. Occasionally, some members depicted the necessity for all family members to participate in household chores in theory, but the focus of Committee activities in reality centered on women's domestic role. Girls and women were to be the main recipients of these initiatives, and only women were sought to become instructors. Men were allowed to attend sessions, but few did. Members perpetuated the domestic image of women by directing these courses predominantly and often solely to women. Young girls, claimed numerous members, needed to be taught domesticity to prepare them for their roles as mothers and wives.³⁰ These programs addressed the need to lessen women's household responsibilities through new techniques of keeping house and technological innovations, but not through changing (or even questioning) women's and men's

²⁸ Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On a return to traditional cultural norms in the 1930s in the Soviet Union, see also David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²⁹ The League occasionally mentioned the use of state-run laundry facilities, but almost all of its programs focused on the individual household and the individual woman running that household.

³⁰ For some examples, see "Konferencja w sprawie gospodarstwa domowego," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 11 (November 1959): 1-2; Helena Spalona, "Rozwój działalności w zakresie gospodarstwa domowego w Polsce," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 11 (November 1959): 3-10, esp. 8; Ewa Zakościelna, "Społeczny front wychowania młodzieży," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1969): 3-5; "1000 lat państwa polskiego," *Nasza praca*, no. 20 (25 December 1958): 1-3; "Zobowiązanie," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 3 (May-June 1968): 1-3; Józefa Adamusowa, "Planowe prace Komitetu Gospodarstwa Domowego oraz placówek terenowych LK w roku bieżącym," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1969): 1-4; and "Od redakcji," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5 (September-October 1971): 26.

domestic roles. The home economics programs actually helped to solidify the traditional images of women as housewives (even if they worked outside the home) and men as breadwinners, images that had been prominent prior to the onset of communism in Poland.³¹

In theory, the Committee attempted to alleviate women's burdens, yet it sometimes advocated, probably inadvertently, an increase in women's responsibilities. Women were instructed to make better, more complex, and healthier meals; sew and repair clothing for their children; keep their homes cleaner and more aesthetically pleasing; and take care of themselves by wearing makeup and styling their own hair.³² In instructions on how to clean their homes, for example, women were told that they daily should air out all bed linens; make beds; put away all clothing, shoes, and other items; dust around windows, doors, stove, and heaters; vacuum rugs and furniture; and wash the floors (sweeping with a broom was inadequate).³³ In some instances, then, the initial goal of lessening women's burdens may have actually failed. Not only did the Committee move away from communal conceptions of domesticity, but it also created greater expectations for what women could and should accomplish within the individual household.

“Truly Important Education”: Helping Women through Domesticity

In what ways, then, did women benefit from these home economics sessions? As Bożena N. stated, “the authorities at that time ridiculed our home economics centers a bit. They said ‘and what are they [women] occupying themselves with there—*garami* [large pots]?’” But, Bożena asserted that

³¹ Sławomira Walczewska makes a similar assessment in Sławomira Walczewska, “Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL,” *Pełnym głosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 25-29, esp. 28.

³² Studies on domestic technology in the United States have pointed to a similar assessment. With greater household technology, advertised as alleviating women's household chores, women actually ended up spending more time cleaning, cooking, etc., since more was expected of them. Clothes were to be washed more frequently, the house was to be cleaner, and meals were to be more complex. See, for example, Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

³³ Krystyna Radzińska, “Konspekt pokazu codzienne sprzątanie mieszkania,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 6 (November-December 1963): 33-42. See also Janina Skibińska, “Higiena mieszkania,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1980): 20-21; and Helena Gintelowa, “Organizacja porządków w mieszkaniu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5-6 (1978): 87-92.

“women deemed this to be very important to them.”³⁴ She strongly believed that the organization’s work was significant and necessary; dealing with domesticity (with “large pots”) was not a trivial matter as “the authorities” had claimed. Urszula P. saw these courses as the most important form of League activism. She claimed that since “not every family was . . . prepared to give this (information) to their children,” these programs became especially crucial.³⁵ Current League president Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka has stated that the work of the Committee was “splendid” and it improved standards of living.³⁶ Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, the last League president of the communist period, indicated that the Committee filled a gap in education.³⁷ Women and girls took courses and attended lectures and demonstrations to learn something about home economics, something that they then could use in their daily lives as mothers, daughters, and housewives—in other words, as women performing their traditionally accepted tasks within the household—or even potentially as a source of income.³⁸ These courses helped prepare young girls for their anticipated domestic role and provided women already running households with additional training and broader information.

The Committee placed demonstrations related to nourishment and food at the center of its initiatives. Families, Committee leaders maintained, did not eat healthily, and women needed to be taught how to prepare well-balanced meals with adequate nutrients and vitamins. Lectures and demonstrations on food, typically followed by tasting, included such issues as including more fruits and vegetables in meals, ensuring that family members incorporated foods with sufficient vitamins in their diets, and preparing meals for parties and larger gatherings. Limiting meat intake was especially important. We had “to persuade women,” stated Bożena N., “that our popular *bigos* [a type of meaty stew] and pork chop should disappear from the table,” and that women should “introduce more vegetables, more dairy products” in meals.³⁹ Her statement and the Committee’s continued emphasis on decreasing meat intake could be interpreted as a political move, related to ongoing price increases

³⁴ Bożena N., interview by author, Warsaw, 17 March 2000.

³⁵ Urszula P., interview by author, Łódź, 27 March 2000.

³⁶ Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, interview by author, Warsaw, 7 March 2000.

³⁷ Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, interview by author, Kraków, 9 June 2000.

³⁸ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000; and Urszula P., interview.

³⁹ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

on foodstuffs, including meats, and ongoing meat shortages. By urging less meat consumption, the League possibly deliberately glossed over the real economic problem of meat shortages in a country where these products were intensely popular. Yet League instructors promoted not only a decrease in meat but also other healthy eating habits—eating a well-balanced diet, incorporating fruits and vegetables, decreasing fat intake, and so on, good eating habits that continue to be advocated today. Bożena stated that the type of nourishment that the League had been promoting since the late 1950s had become fashionable in the 1990s in Poland.⁴⁰ “Then, we were somewhat laughed at for this,” she claimed, “but as I have said, this was a serious problem. This was truly important education for women.”⁴¹ The League’s information on nourishment starting as early as the 1950s was beneficial. It promoted healthy eating habits and was not necessarily tied to political and propagandistic action.

In the early 1980s, with the onset of martial law, limited availability of food and other necessities, and introduction of ration cards, League publications directly acknowledged the economic crisis at hand and demonstrated ways in which the organization could assist women in meeting their everyday needs.⁴² Many members explicitly complained about food shortages, long lines, and price hikes, as well as lack of available health and hygiene products.⁴³ In 1983, the Committee along with the

⁴⁰ Today, for example, vegetarian restaurants are becoming popular and youth in particular has been advocating eating more healthily by among other things decreasing meat in diets.

⁴¹ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

⁴² On the economic crisis, see, for example, Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, “The Myth of the Market and the Reality of Reform,” in *Polish Paradoxes*, ed. Stanisław Gomułka and Antony Polonsky (London: Routledge, 1990), 160-179; and Jadwiga Staniszkis, “Poland’s Economic Dilemma: ‘De-articulation’ or ‘Ownership Reform,’” in *ibid.*, 180-197.

⁴³ For some examples, see Helena Gintelowa, “Oświata w zakresie gospodarstwa domowego w roku 1981,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1981): 1-2; Anna Kędzierska, “Gospodarujmy z ołówkiem w ręku,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1982): 1-2; Alicja Zdybel, “Upowszechnianie zagadnień gospodarstwa domowego w aktualnych warunkach ekonomicznych,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 1-3; Teresa Pałaszewska-Reindl, “Sytuacja ekonomiczna polskich rodzin—teraźniejszość i perspektywy,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5 (September-October 1988): 1-5; Alicja Zdybel-Stańczyk, “Perspektywy polskich gospodarstw domowych w aktualnej sytuacji społeczno-gospodarczej kraju,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1989): 1-4; Zofia Kędzior, “Położenie materialne gospodarstw domowych a stopień zaspokojenia potrzeb konsumpcyjnych,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5-6 (September-December 1989): 9-10; Zofia Skrzypaczek and Władysława Zborowska, “Strategia oszczędzania w gospodarstwach domowych w warunkach silnej inflacji i niedoborów rynkowych,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5-6 (September-December 1989): 11-14; Alicja Zdybel, “Kształtowanie społecznie pożądanego modelu polskiego gospodarstwa domowego,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 3-4 (May-August 1990): 3-5; Alicja Zdybel, “Oszczędne gospodarowanie w rodzinie,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1986): 15-17; Danuta Radomska, “Racjonalne i ekonomiczne żywienie rodziny,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1988): 42-44; Alicja Zdybel, “Zacieśniamy współpracę ze spółdzielczymi i działaczkami kół gospodyń wiejskich w imię

Central Administration organized a national academic seminar dealing with the economic crisis as it related to the household. This particular seminar is indicative of the importance that the organization placed on this crisis.⁴⁴

Since women traditionally had been in charge of shopping for food and household necessities, they felt the brunt of the crisis as consumers. The organization, according to Urszula P., “changed depending on needs . . . during times of crisis. It is well-known that when a crisis occurs women . . . feel this the most, because their families are threatened.” As mothers, she suggested, women felt a special obligation to ensure that their families’ needs were met.⁴⁵ Standing in long lines, searching for ways to find food and other goods for their families, and making do with what was available largely fell onto their shoulders.⁴⁶ During this period, Urszula continued, “the situation became more nervous.” To help remedy the crisis, “we had to have more of that self-composure, we had to meet more often, we had to talk more with these women, we had to talk about these problems.”⁴⁷ The League attempted to assist women during this critical period using its already established programs and tactics—talking to women, organizing meetings, and especially utilizing its home economics programs.

The Committee’s primary focus in the 1980s was on changing how women ran the household, and not on how the state should transform the economy to assist women. League initiatives stressed

żywotnych interesów wszystkich kobiet miast i wsi,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1983): 16-19; File “Sprawozdanie z działalności Wojewódzkiego Ośrodka Gospodarstwa Domowego w Częstochowie,” 1983-1989, sygn. 71, Archiwum Państwowe w Częstochowie (hereafter APC); Anna Kędzierska, interview by Elżbieta Jędrych, “Chcę, żeby mi dokuczano,” *Przyjaciółka*, no. 31 (2 August 1984): 2-3; and Marysia P., interview by author, Nowy Targ, 2 June 2000.

⁴⁴ Papers presented at the seminar were published in Teresa Pałaszewska-Reindl, ed., *Polskie gospodarstwa domowe: Życie codzienne w kryzysie* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, 1986).

⁴⁵ Urszula P., interview.

⁴⁶ Zofia Kędzior, “Z badań nad działalnością i postawami gospodarstw domowych w aktualnej sytuacji społeczno-gospodarczej,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5 (September-October 1982): 40-41; and Alicja Zdybel, “Stan funkcjonowania polskich gospodarstw domowych,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5-6 (September-December 1989): 1-8. Kędzior and Zdybel indicated that waiting in lines and preparing meals were two of the tasks on which women spent the most time during this critical period. See also, Kristi Long, *We All Fought for Freedom: Women in Poland’s Solidarity Movement* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), esp. chap. 2.

⁴⁷ Urszula P., interview.

resourcefulness.⁴⁸ For example, Committee leaders guided women on how to repair clothing, make slippers out of scraps of fabric or old clothing, and save energy.⁴⁹ In some ways, then, the League retreated from its promotion of consumerism during this period of scarcity. Rather than buy new clothing (which was not always easy to find), for example, women were encouraged to make do with what they already had. It is possible that the Committee promoted resourcefulness as a way to assist the state by urging women to overlook the economic crisis. Rather than focus on what was unavailable, to some extent women were encouraged to deal with what they already had. Yet the Committee also persistently discussed and criticized the crisis openly, showing that members were uneasy about the situation. Promotion of resourcefulness points to a deeper concern over women's specific position within that crisis.

The Committee's courses and lectures during the 1980s reflected the ongoing food crisis. For women, most of whom had the responsibility of purchasing and preparing food for their families, lack of adequate foodstuffs became especially troubling.⁵⁰ Home economics sessions emphasized the nutritional meals women could prepare and substitutions of products in meals based on availability. "During that period," Bożena N. said, "our market was not saturated as it is at this moment. . . . We had to show what to make from what we had, how they [women] could instill nourishment in the home so that it would be sensible and economical. Today we have yogurts, we have kefir, then we did not have

⁴⁸ Not only the League but also women's press in general stressed women's resourcefulness during this period. As Zofia Sokół has stated, images of strong and resourceful women, some knitting new sweaters out of old ones and making dinners out of leftovers, dominated women's publications. Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945-1995* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1998), 353-54.

⁴⁹ Gintelowa, "Oświata w zakresie gospodarstwa domowego"; Zdybel, "Upowszechnianie zagadnień gospodarstwa domowego"; "Szyjemy pantofle domowe," *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1982): 52-59; Helena Gintelowa, "Oszczędne gospodarowanie energią cieplną i świetlną w gospodarstwie domowym," *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5 (September-October 1981): 31-32; and "Sprawozdanie z działalności Poradni Gospodarstwa Domowego," 1983, File "Sprawozdanie z działalności Wojewódzkiego Ośrodka Gospodarstwa Domowego w Częstochowie, 1983-1989," sygn. 71, APC.

⁵⁰ As Long has stated: "food came to hold a very special symbolic position in Communist Poland. When speaking with women about their experiences of activism the discussions often center around food." Not surprisingly, then, the League likewise focused on food. Long, *We All Fought for Freedom*, 152. "Sprawozdanie z działalności Wojewódzkiej Poradni Gospodarstwa Domowego w Częstochowie za okres 1984 roku," File "Sprawozdanie z działalności Wojewódzkiego Ośrodka Gospodarstwa Domowego w Częstochowie, 1983-1989," sygn. 71, APC states that feeding families in the actual economic situation was the central component of lectures and demonstrations related to nourishment.

these things.”⁵¹ Demonstrations, for instance, explained to women how to use oil, mayonnaise, kefir, or sour cream in recipes dependent on what was available; and how to use leftovers and stale bread in new meals.⁵² With a shortage of potatoes and meat, staples of Poles’ diets, the Committee’s journal provided recipes on how to include macaroni and cereals into meals.⁵³ Instead of meats, instructors showed how to use milk, cheese, and eggs to a greater degree as a source of protein.⁵⁴ Women were instructed to raise their own animals on small plots of land if they had any land, plant vegetables in pots on balconies, and use seasonal fruits and vegetables in preparing meals.⁵⁵ When each person was allowed to buy only 2.5 kilograms of meat per month, stated Bożena N., “our home economics centers immediately started to have demonstrations and courses on what you could make for one person and how to run that household and with what to supplement these products.” Even though this seemed “banal,” she continued, “we had to show women where besides meat they could find natural protein This was our actual arduous, everyday ant-like work.”⁵⁶ The League continued to stress women’s domesticity and focused on how women needed to alter their ways of cooking, shopping, and running households.

⁵¹ Bożena N., interview by author, Warsaw, 1 June 2000.

⁵² Gintelowa, “Oświata w zakresie gospodarstwa domowego”; Ewa Siemaszko, “Żywnienie rodziny w okresie reglamentacji żywności,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 3 (May-June 1981): 4-7; Anna Ners and Anna Szczepańska, “Nie dopuszczajmy do zmarnowania żywności,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5 (September-October 1981): 9-11; Helena Koprowska, “Zapobieganie marnotrawstwu żywności,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 7-11; and Helena Gintelowa, “Chrońmy żywność przed zepsuciem,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1982): 60-62.

⁵³ Helena Koprowska, “Wszechstronne wykorzystanie klusek i makaronów w żywieniu rodziny,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1981): 9-13, and Helena Koprowska, “Potrawy z klusek i makaronów: Konspekt pokazu,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1981): 34-36.

⁵⁴ Helena Gintelowa, “Jak gospodarować produktami pochodzenia zwierzęcego w okresie kryzysu,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 6 (November-December 1981): 4-6; and Ewa Siemaszko, “Wartościowe potrawy bezmięsne: Konspekt pokazu,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 38-39.

⁵⁵ Jadwiga Rydzewska, “Szukanie dodatkowych źródeł produktów spożywczych: Podstawy chowu przydomnego drobiu, królików i świń,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1982): 12-14; Grażyna Bolek-Spiechowicza, “Ogród na balkonie,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 2 (March-April 1982): 14-15; and “Owoce w codziennym jadłospisie,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1982): 37-39. This is similar to initiatives that home economists took during the Great Depression in the United States. They, for example, encouraged women to communally can and grow foods. See Kathleen R. Babbitt, “Legitimizing Nutrition Education: The Impact of the Great Depression,” in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 145-62.

⁵⁶ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

As an official women's organization supported by the party, the League predominantly addressed the crisis in a way in which it felt comfortable, using its already established programs, rather than directly opposing and confronting the state. In at least one case, however, party officials reprimanded the organization for publishing a controversial poem written by a League member, Irena Hamerska, in *Nasza praca*, which directly criticized the introduction of ration cards. In the words of Bożena N., Hamerska's poem stated that "after all one cannot place this card on a plate, because there will be no benefit from this card, and one cannot buy much with it." Women wanted and needed actual food, not cards, on dinner plates, for their family's survival. Hamerska pointed to the centrality women placed on food. Ration cards, in her opinion, were ludicrous. "Of course," Bożena N. continued, "for this, we (the League) had huge trouble from the Central Committee (of the Communist Party)." Party officials threatened that if the League allowed "this type of pronouncement" again, the party would dissolve the League bulletin.⁵⁷ What is important here is not the exact wording of the poem, but *Nasza praca's* editorial staff's decision to publish such a poem, which directly criticized an economic system that party officials established. Indirectly, Hamerska criticized the party for its initiative. The staff of the bulletin may not have predicted the implications of the decision to publish Hamerska's verse, but they probably, at the very least, realized that this poem was laden with controversy. In this particular case, then, the League exhibited signs of defiance against the party-state. In turn, party leaders displayed their authority in reprimanding the League for this action because the organization had deliberately stepped over the boundary between what the party deemed acceptable and unacceptable.

Throughout the period under study, women who took courses and attended lectures and demonstrations learned or expanded their domestic skills. In 1971, the League in the city of Żyrdów conducted an anonymous survey of girls who took a 900-hour course in home economics.⁵⁸ Out of the subjects taught, the forty-five students who responded indicated that they liked "studies on the human being, everyday cultural life, cutting and sewing, as well as sensible nourishment of the family" most. One of the reasons that they gave for choosing these topics as their favorite was "coming into contact

⁵⁷ Bożena N. conveyed this information during an interview. Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000. According to Bożena, the party reprimanded the League, not Hamerska. I searched unsuccessfully for this poem.

⁵⁸ This course was geared specifically toward girls who finished elementary schooling but for various reasons were not planning to attend high school for at least the time being. Many of the students came from rural areas.

with these subjects for the first time and their practical meaning in life.”⁵⁹ In answer to what the course offered students, the League received such replies as “the course prepared me for . . . independence”; “it helped me regain confidence in myself and others”; “I met friendly instructors, who served me with advice and assistance”; “I was given information and principles of cultural life, which at home no one would have been able to teach me”; and finally “I did not waste the year—I did not lose contact with education.”⁶⁰ These girls not only garnered useful information that they could then use at home or even in employment, but they also developed a greater sense of “independence” and “confidence.” Upon completing these courses, they received a certificate indicating that they were qualified to work in a home economics occupation in such areas as food, laundry, and sewing services.⁶¹

The League ran one- to two-hour lectures and demonstrations about once per month in chapter offices or after work in workplaces on topics that individual chapters wanted.⁶² Sessions related to health issues, such as how to conduct breast self-exams or use herbal health remedies, “pleased women very much,” stated Kazimiera C.⁶³ Danuta B. claimed that she “learned a lot of things. . . . I to this day have learned embroidery in this chapter,”⁶⁴ while Marysia P. said that the League taught “us, for example, different recipes, embroidery, sewing, helping one another, everything.” Marysia put it bluntly: “Where do you think I learned how to style my own hair?” For her this knowledge was useful, and she continued to this day to use the techniques that she learned as a young woman in the League.⁶⁵ Bożena N. likewise stated that as a young woman she learned about “sensible nourishment” through a

⁵⁹ Jadwiga Grabowska, “Roczny kurs dla dziewcząt: Analiza osiągnięć i potrzeb na przykładzie kursu rocznego dla dziewcząt po szkole podstawowej organizowanego przez Poradnię Gospodarstwa Domowego w Żyrardowie,” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 5 (September-October 1971): 27-28, quotations on 27. They least liked lessons about Poland and the contemporary world and the Polish language (since they already had learned these subjects in school), and bookkeeping and neatness.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶¹ Urszula P., interview.

⁶² Kazimiera C., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000; Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000; and Urszula P., interview.

⁶³ Kazimiera C., interview.

⁶⁴ Danuta B., interview by author, Nowy Targ, 2 June 2000.

⁶⁵ Marysia P., interview.

home economics center.⁶⁶ Urszula P. maintained that women wanted to attend these courses because “they were able to gain something from them. . . . Women appreciated this very much.” Even today, she stated, women come to the League office hoping that the organization could continue to run such courses.⁶⁷ These benefits seem trivial, but, in fact, for these women, these courses were important sources of what they deemed valuable knowledge from which they continue to benefit.

Courses in personal aesthetics are particularly interesting. Socialist women ideally were not supposed to be concerned with cosmetics, hairstyling, and fashion. The new socialist woman was to repudiate these frivolous and “superficial, ‘bourgeois’ inventions” and instead focus her energy on a strong work ethic. In place of individual and personal tastes, women were supposed to be “robust women who didn’t look much different from a man.” But, in fact, women longed for cosmetics and often used whatever they could find on the market to make themselves beautiful.⁶⁸ Through League courses, women learned about personal aesthetics—about how to put on make-up, what cosmetics and products were best, how to style their own hair, and what clothing was fashionable. By holding these lectures, the organization encouraged individualism and consumption. These courses served not only women’s needs as mothers and wives but also their personal needs as women. The organization moved beyond the state-promoted ideal of devoted worker and dutiful mother by embracing personal aesthetics.

A few scholars have argued that this individual consumerism was a source of defiance against the state. For example, Slavenka Drakulić has written, “To be yourself, to cultivate individualism, to perceive yourself as an individual in a mass society is dangerous. You might become living proof that the system is failing. Make-up and fashion are crucial because they are political.” Furthermore, she has

⁶⁶ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000. Partly because of her experience in such courses, she decided to join the League.

⁶⁷ Urszula P., interview. A few centers continue to function in Poland. For example, the provincial administration in Opole still runs cooking courses for girls. It also holds banquets and parties as a means to make money. Irena H., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000.

⁶⁸ Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 23. In Drakulić’s opinion one of the reasons why Polish women dyed their hair the same color red, for example, was because that was the only dye that was available on the market. She also states that women used cucumber slices, lemon, olive oil, and other food items because they had no other choice (in contrast to Western women who did have a choice).

stated that “real consumerism was impossible.”⁶⁹ Rather than defying the state, the League’s promotion of fashion and make-up demonstrates how socialism functioned on the ground. The League may have opposed socialist ideology, and not the state, by promoting such individual consumption for the private body and personal pleasure. Even state officials encouraged consumption and individualism within socialist states.⁷⁰

The Home Economics Committee has a mixed history. At the same time, it has been laughed at for dealing only with trivial domesticity (“large pots”) and it has been respected for providing women necessary household and employment skills. In certain cases, the Committee promoted programs that simultaneously aided women and strengthened the party-state. Although Committee leaders did not formulate feminist ideas and did not strive to alter traditional gender roles, it did provide the women who took advantage of its programs with valuable information that assisted them in their everyday practical lives.

The League as Intermediary for Women

In addition to the benefits that the Home Economics Committee provided to women, the organization also served as a free legal counseling center and an intermediary between state officials/institutions and women. Through these interventionist programs, the League attempted to assist women in alleviating their everyday problems and hardships. Depending on the initiative, women approached League chapters or individual members for personal assistance, or League representatives initiated some form of help for women in general.⁷¹

The League operated a variety of clinics: *poradnie rodzinne* (family clinics), *poradnie pedagogiczne* (pedagogical clinics), and the most well-known *poradnie prawno-społeczne* (social-legal

⁶⁹ Ibid., 26, 27. Although Drakulić’s work is very one-sided leaving little room for a balanced view of the communist period, she does in fact provide wonderful examples of what life was like for many women. See also Crowley and Reid, “Style and Socialism.”

⁷⁰ For example, see Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, esp. chap. 4.

⁷¹ Genia Browning also has shown that the *zhensovety* in the Soviet Union sometimes acted as a pressure group on behalf of women, particularly in the workplace. Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR: Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women’s Groups* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), chap. 7.

clinics). Women, as well as some men, sought free counseling, advice, or assistance through the social-legal clinics. For many women, these clinics became a way in which women felt comfortable seeking and receiving legal advice. The clinics served as a middle ground between women and the legal system. Staffed with volunteer attorneys, clinics eventually functioned throughout the country typically in provincial or city administration offices. At their height, approximately five hundred such social-legal clinics provided free services for women.⁷² In 1965 alone, almost seventy-one thousand consultations took place.⁷³ These clinics were typically open once or twice per week for a few hours each time.⁷⁴ Common issues for which women sought legal help ranged from domestic problems and abuse, alcoholism, divorce, alimony, and child support to housing shortages, inadequate childcare facilities, employment opportunities, and early retirement. In the mid-1950s, the Gdańsk clinic, for example, “gained popularity among women” by intervening on behalf of female sole breadwinners who were laid off from work.⁷⁵ Clinic attorneys often offered assistance in court cases or guided women in a direction that was best suited for their specific problem.

The League also served as an intermediary between women and various state bodies. Women, and sometimes men, approached individual members or chapters—either personally or through letters—in an effort to get something resolved or accomplished, such as finding preschool openings, obtaining clothing for impoverished families, finding apartments, and resolving work-related problems.⁷⁶ In 1986, after receiving requests, the secretary and president of the League’s Częstochowa provincial administration wrote letters to the city’s vice-president, asking to change apartments for a

⁷² On the number of clinics, see Krystyna Mojowska and Wanda Tycner, “Ruch kobiecy w ślepym zaułku?” *Zwierciadło*, no. 5 (29 January 1981): 2.

⁷³ Romana Lewandowska, “Działalność w latach pięćdziesiątych i sześćdziesiątych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1985): 18-20, esp. 19. By 1984, that number had dropped significantly to about twenty-three thousand. See “Skargi wnioski listy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1985): 7-8.

⁷⁴ A few chapters continue to provide these services.

⁷⁵ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej,” 13. Ratman-Liwerska has also noted that the League in Białystok intervened on behalf of women who were laid off from work. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 144.

⁷⁶ Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000; Danuta B., interview; Marysia P., interview; “Skargi wnioski listy”; and Teresa Kucharska, “Kartka z pamiętnika,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1985): 27-33.

couple of women.⁷⁷ After already going to the Warsaw City Office, national Cabinet, and Communist Party's Central Committee, Anna Szutkowska turned to the League in Warsaw for assistance in getting an apartment.⁷⁸ In 1978, a League office received a letter from a small village asking that the organization assist in getting alimony and child support for a single mother.⁷⁹ Another woman asked the League to help her in ensuring that a blood test was done correctly to determine the father of her child.⁸⁰ After having lost their jobs in an agricultural coop, three young women went to the League with hopes of obtaining assistance. The local chapter found work for them in another coop.⁸¹ In the Białystok province, the League intervened on behalf of unemployed women in the city of Suwałki by initiating the creation of a shoe factory, which employed sixty women and found housing for girls who moved to cities for schooling.⁸² Other forms of individual assistance included gathering clothing for ill and poor children, moving a woman with cancer to a better facility, and lengthening the stay of another woman at a shelter.⁸³ Helena Śnieżewska from Gdańsk recalled how the League helped her obtain care for her five children when she went into labor with her sixth, and then again when she worked while her husband fell ill.⁸⁴ The Kraków League assisted a homeless single mother to get an apartment. To this day, Łęcznarowiczowa has claimed, the woman thanks the organization's members for this aid.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Barbara Galaj and Elżbieta Mieszczńska to Antoni Suliński, 3 April 1986, File "Skargi i wnioski wpływające do ZW LKP w Częstochowie, 1978-1986," sygn. 99, APC. See also Gabriela Krawczyk to Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa 'Hutnik,' 4 September 1980, in *ibid.* for similar requests.

⁷⁸ Anna Szutkowska to LKP Warsaw, 27 September 1982, File "Skargi i wnioski wpływające do ZW LKP w Częstochowie, 1978-1986," sygn. 99, APC.

⁷⁹ Letter from a small village to ZW LKP Częstochowa, 14 January 1978, File "Skargi i wnioski wpływające do ZW LKP w Częstochowie, 1978-1986," sygn. 99, APC.

⁸⁰ Jadwiga Bekus to ZG LKP, 18 February 1985, File "Skargi i wnioski wpływające do ZW LKP w Częstochowie, 1978-1986," sygn. 99, APC.

⁸¹ Irena Koralewska, "Dzień powszedni w naszej Lidze," *Kobieta Wielkopolska: Jednodniówka z okazji 50 rocznicy międzynarodowego dnia kobiet, 1910-1960*, ed. Zinaida Myszcynowa (Poznań: ZWLK, February 1960), 30-32, esp. 30-31.

⁸² Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 145.

⁸³ Dorota Wierzbanowska to SOLK Central Administration, Kraków, 5 December 1947, File "Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, 1946-1948," sygn. PPR Kr 347, APK.

⁸⁴ Helena Śnieżewska, "Jestem wdzięczna LK," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1956): 31.

⁸⁵ Łęcznarowiczowa, interview.

In the mid-1980s, the Central Administration received numerous letters from women from all over Poland about the poor quality and high prices of “tights, pantyhose, and women’s socks.” Women complained that “these goods are impractical, weak, and expensive, and furthermore it is not easy to buy them in a suitable color and size.” Pantyhose and tights were “sewn improperly” often with no elastic at the waist, causing them to “immediately stretch out,” and the tops were often disproportionate in size to the legs. “There was also a shortage of tights in dark colors, even though they were sought after most.”⁸⁶ In response to these letters, the Central Administration wrote to the Minister of Chemical and Light Industry, asking that the situation be changed. Although it is unclear from these sources whether or not this or other problems were actually resolved, the women who wrote letters recognized the League as an intermediary between themselves and some state institution or industry. They saw the organization’s potential in serving their personal needs.⁸⁷

Members likewise understood themselves as mediators between women and party officials as well as state institutions. A number of members in interviews repeatedly stated that, unlike in the present situation, women during the communist period had some place to go—their local League chapter or the Central Administration (as in the cases above)—in search of assistance. Presently, they do not know where or to whom to go to seek help; and even League representatives have less of a sense of where to go today than they did during the communist era.⁸⁸ The League, as a party-affiliated organization, and especially its members who were also party members, had greater access to certain state officials and ministries and had greater potential in assisting these women than women (particularly women not affiliated with the party) had on their own. As Danuta B. stated: “If you were already in the League of Women then you could go to the [state] administration, [and] in the

⁸⁶ “Śladem naszych interwencji,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1986): 31-32, quotation on 31.

⁸⁷ Of course, not all women understood the League as a mediator. Wanda Bundy, a train conductor from Skierniewice, for example, stated that if she needed help she would not go to the League; it would not “enter my head,” she said. Teresa Krzywiec, a clerk, asserted that if she thought the League would actually assist her in such matters as finding a spot for her child in a preschool or in doing grocery shopping after work, then maybe she would join the organization, but she did not recognize the group as dealing with such matters. Banasiak and Ratyńska, “Tyle jeszcze trzeba zrobić.”

⁸⁸ Danuta B., interview; Marysia P., interview; Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000; Wanda K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000; Barbara K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000; Łęcznarowiczowa, interview; and Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, “Zmiana sytuacji kobiet po 1989 roku—poprawa czy pogorszenie?” in *Polskie oblicza feminizmu: Materiały z konferencji “Polskie oblicza feminizmu” Uniwersytet Warszawski 8 marca 1999*, ed. Weronika Chańska and Danuta Ulicka (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2000), 53-57, esp. 55.

administration they would [talk] to you because you were a member of the League of Women. Well, this was the same . . . with the party. If you were in the party, . . . then . . . you could go to this [party] committee. . . . And also with these nonparty people, it was like they [party officials] wanted to and did not want to talk with them.”⁸⁹ Urszula P. stated that even though the organization was not always liked by “the government and authorities,” as a party-subsidized organization, it was able “to do a lot for these women.”⁹⁰ “I am not an attorney,” stated Zofia K., “but I knew where to send a given person for her to get what she needed.”⁹¹ In the 1980s, when certain goods, such as “soap and detergents,” were absent from the market, some members tried to obtain these items from store warehouses especially for poor families with numerous children. They had greater access to warehouses and backrooms than women not affiliated with the organization.⁹² By being part of the state system, through their involvement in the official women’s organization (whether or not they were party members), League members recognized their role in intervening on behalf of women and placed this role at the center of their activism.

By all means, League representatives were not always successful in fixing these individual problems. “The party,” Danuta B. stated, did not always “allow these or other things to pass”; officials sometimes refused to assist these women, even though League members served as their spokespeople. At the very least, women who sought assistance could find out whether or not their particular problem was solvable, or where else they could go to seek further help.⁹³

During the 1980s, Home Economics Committee leaders took an interventionist stance by writing letters to various party ministries complaining about the economic situation and demanding that

⁸⁹ Danuta B., interview.

⁹⁰ Urszula P., interview.

⁹¹ Zofia K., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000. Helena C. made similar claims. Helena C., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

⁹² Zofia K., interview.

⁹³ Danuta B., interview. A few other interviewees expressed similar ideas. Marysia P., interview; Kazimiera C., interview; and Wanda K., interview. On difficulty of solving some problems, see also Koralewska, “Dzień powszedni w naszej Lidze,” 30.

changes be made.⁹⁴ Their letters, for example, called for more and higher quality soaps, cleaning detergents, and women's feminine hygiene products. They awaited changes often with "skepticism" and typically exhibited dissatisfaction with the lack of concern from various ministers and frustration that the situation was not improving.⁹⁵ In a statement about these letters, one article stated: "although the responses that we received to our interventions [meaning these letters] admit that we are right, they do not satisfy us, since the problems they take up have not been satisfactorily settled." As a result, the Committee planned to continue to follow the economic situation and send letters demanding that ministers make significant changes.⁹⁶ In another article about the League's demands for feminine hygiene products, which were abysmally absent on the market, the Committee maintained that although the party reassured them that the situation would improve, "time is passing, but we are unfortunately not feeling any improvements for the time being."⁹⁷ This particular activism of the Committee demonstrates two things. First, the League complained directly to party officials about the economic crisis and did not simply stand on the sidelines waiting for changes to be made. Second, the Committee's dissatisfaction shows that the organization was unwilling to accept reassurances by various ministries that the situation would improve without seeing direct results. Although it is difficult to assess how much success these letters eventually had in solving these issues, the letters at the very least show that in these particular cases the organization acted and intervened on behalf of women, including themselves.

Some members also have claimed that during the rise of Solidarity some chapters helped to bail women out of jail.⁹⁸ It is unclear, however, how many women were assisted in this manner. But

⁹⁴ For some examples of discussions of these letters, see "Liga Kobiet domaga się," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1981): 22-25; "Liga Kobiet domaga się . . .," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1981): 38-42; "Interwencje i postulaty KGD (1): W sprawie mydła, środków piorących i czyszczących," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1982): 18-21; "Interwencje Komitetu Gospodarstwa Domowego dotyczące poprawy jakości środków czyszczących," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1985): 12-13; Janina Skibińska, "Wydatki rodziny na środki higieny osobistej i środki utrzymania czystości," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1986): 3-5; "Śladem naszych interwencji"; and Wata," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1987): 32-33.

⁹⁵ "Wata," 33.

⁹⁶ "Interwencje i postulaty KGD (1)," 21.

⁹⁷ "Wata," 32.

⁹⁸ Bożena N. interview, 17 March and 1 June 2000; and Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000. Anna Reading likewise has mentioned this intervention in Anna Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 172.

this action (however large or small) does show that in some cases factions of the organization acted on behalf of women who worked against the party-state—women whom the state viewed as threats to its system—pointing to elements of dissent, resistance, and possible independence within the organization at this particular historical moment. Furthermore, according to Bożena N., the League’s provincial administration in Gdańsk, the center of the Solidarity Movement, outright supported the twenty-one postulates of the Inter-Factory Strike Committee (although the entire League showed neither support for nor dissent from these demands).⁹⁹ Some of the demands dealt with issues related to women: increasing nursery school spaces for working mothers, implementation of three-year maternity leave, decreasing the time families had to wait to obtain housing, and increases in nurses’ wages, but none focused on women’s employment and political rights.¹⁰⁰ The Gdańsk administration’s support demonstrates that local initiative sometimes did indeed differ from central activism and that the organization did not necessarily follow the party line.

These cases—the social-legal clinics, letters and appeals from women, and intervention on behalf of women—point to the League’s role as an intermediary between the state and women. In all the above examples, League representatives acted on women’s behalf in negotiations with state authorities and institutions. As the official women’s organization, the League had greater and easier access to these authorities than women who were not involved in the organization or the party. The women who sought assistance from the League also understood the group as a mediator between them and the state. Finally, through these interventions, the League attempted to serve women’s needs individually and collectively, including cases in which they directly confronted the state (particularly in the 1980s) about its inadequacy in providing necessary goods and services.

⁹⁹ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

¹⁰⁰ On the demands related to women, see Renata Siemieńska, “Dialogue: Polish Women and Polish Politics since World War II,” *Journal of Women’s History* 3, no. 1 (spring 1991): 108-25, esp. 119, Renata Siemieńska, “Women and Social Movements in Poland,” *Women and Politics* 6, no. 4 (winter 1986): 5-35, 29; and Barbara W. Jancar, “Women in the Opposition in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s,” in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 168-94, esp. 177.

A Female Space for Socializing and Volunteering

League meetings, lectures, courses, and spontaneous gatherings offered women, especially rank-and-file members, a female space for socializing, spending free time, and discussing issues with other women away from work and family. The organization also gave members an outlet for volunteering and provided them with a sense of feeling needed and satisfaction in their activism. As the only urban women's group during the communist period, women who desired to participate in an organization assisting women did not have another outlet until the 1980s when other non-party affiliated women's organizations started to appear.

The League has been criticized for being only a social organization where women came together to gossip, sip tea and coffee, and eat pastries.¹⁰¹ Janina Skocka, a rural housewife, for instance, stated that “in the city [women's organization] there is more gossip and less work,” while Wanda Bundy questioned whether an entire women's organization is needed for chit-chat among friends.¹⁰² Kempara condemned the general perception of the League as simply holding “social teas and boring meetings” for its members—“older, nice ladies,” who had nothing better to do—a common assessment of the organization by many Poles.¹⁰³ People discussed the organization “with a wink, sometimes comically” stated a delegate at the eighth national conference.¹⁰⁴ At once it was celebrated by its members as a useful organization and laughed at by others as just another forum for “*baby*” to get together and gossip. For most sessions, indeed, the League chapter provided or attendees brought tea, coffee, and pastries to share with each other, a common form of hospitality among Poles in general

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Eugenia Kempara, “Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1982): 6-21, esp. 11 in which she condemned such ongoing criticism.

¹⁰² Banasiak and Ratyńska, “Tyle jeszcze trzeba zrobić.”

¹⁰³ Mojłowska and Tycner, “Ruch kobiecy w ślepym zaułku,” 11. When discussing my dissertation topic, I often came across such criticisms of the organization from Poles. The League no doubt held “social teas and boring meetings” alongside other programs and activities, and its membership was growing older.

¹⁰⁴ “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 26.

whenever and wherever they came together.¹⁰⁵ Members transferred this familiar hospitality into individual chapter offices. They brought their more “private” form of entertaining into a “public” space.

Conversing, socializing, drinking tea and coffee, and eating should not be interpreted as solely negative, without any benefits for women. In fact these women wanted and needed a place in which to socialize and relax; League activities provided that opportunity to women.¹⁰⁶ Courses were not only instructional and meetings were not only formal, but both also functioned as important social gatherings. For some less active members, this socializing was the most important part of their participation. Some women wanted only “to meet for tea, good pastries, gossip a little, and leave.”¹⁰⁷

League events were a way for women to enjoy their free time among other women.¹⁰⁸ “It was relaxation (*odprężenie*) away from home, from young children, from everything, we did not have to think about anything. . . . Nothing concerned me,” stated Danuta B.¹⁰⁹ She believed that women needed to retreat from everyday worries, their multiple responsibilities, even if they were able to do so only once or twice per month. For Irena H., meetings were “an escape from the home,” especially after she gave birth to her first son. “Family responsibilities changed somewhat; we were no longer so free. And going to these women’s organization’s meetings was, for me, my time.”¹¹⁰ Meetings served as an “escape,” a source of freedom, from her new family responsibilities that centered on her infant. They provided her with time for herself in the company of other women, some of whom probably were in the

¹⁰⁵ “Kronika 1975-1976 (Krowodrza)”;¹⁰⁵ Kazimiera C., interview; Marysia P., interview; and Danuta B., interview. Upon arrival at a Polish home, for example, hosts first bring out a plate of food and tea or coffee, depending on what is available. During most of my interviews, the interviewees offered tea and pastries, or in the case of my interviews in the Opole League chapter, entire meals.

¹⁰⁶ According to Genia Browning, classes in home economics that the *zhensovety* offered in the Soviet Union likewise “provide[d] women with much needed relaxation.” Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

¹⁰⁸ The League was concerned about women having enough free time for themselves. Attending home economics sessions was one way in which they could enjoy other women’s company while also learning something important that would, the League claimed, help them in alleviating some of their burdens and eventually resulted in more free time. See, for example, Ludmila Grudowa and Irena Zalewska, “Ankieta ‘Wolny czas,’” *Gospodarstwo domowe*, no. 6 (November-December 1970): 32-34 for a survey of women’s free time.

¹⁰⁹ Danuta B., interview.

¹¹⁰ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

same situation as she. Władysława Łukaszewicz, a member of a chapter in Krosno, felt that this form of relaxation was essential for a hardworking and tired woman. A “woman wants to leave the house and relax in a somewhat different way than sitting in front of the television.”¹¹¹ These gatherings, Lęcznarowiczowa recalled, were “extremely important psychologically” for women. Women could “sit down, chat with someone, and be heard.” This socializing was not without conflict, however. Arguments also erupted, she stated.¹¹²

Through these gatherings, the League created female spaces, away from husbands, sons, fathers, and male bosses and co-workers, in which women discussed a variety of issues woman-to-woman. “Something common links us,” and “women usually find a common language,” Urszula P. declared.¹¹³ Women may have felt more comfortable in these female gatherings to converse about personal problems, employment, issues of everyday life, and sometimes even politics.¹¹⁴ An entry in a League chapter scrapbook, for example, stated: “Knitting and crocheting needles are flashing by in the hands of the students, and simultaneously one could hear loud conversation. One could find out about many interesting things.”¹¹⁵ It was not “gossiping,” Helena P. claimed. “We talked about various topics, actual complaints if someone had them, . . . or how to solve certain problems.”¹¹⁶

Leokadia Błochowa, a housewife and president of a residential chapter in Pabianice, expressed her strong sentiments about what the organization meant to her.

In our apartment building women have become close friends thanks to the League of Women’s chapter. . . . In the evenings a few of us often come together in some apartment. One

¹¹¹ Krosno chapter members, interview by Elżbieta Banasiak, “Czy tylko babskie gadanie?” *Przyjaciółka*, no. 3 (27 July 1980): 3.

¹¹² Lęcznarowiczowa, interview.

¹¹³ Urszula P., interview.

¹¹⁴ Wanda K. and Barbara K. maintained that in their League chapter in Nowa Huta women did not discuss politics at all during the communist period until the transition in the late 1980s. Today, politics are the central topic of discussion. They claimed that in the previous era, these women did not feel a need to talk about political issues whereas currently with significant and ongoing, often confusing, changes, they feel that they have to participate in political debates. They did not mention, however, that political discussions today are also more acceptable and less threatening than during the communist period, and people in general can criticize the political situation without fear of retribution. Wanda K., interview; and Barbara K., interview.

¹¹⁵ “Kronika 1975-1976 (Krowodrza),” 9 November 1975. See also the 10 March 1975 entry.

¹¹⁶ Helena P., interview by author, Opole, 18 May 2000.

reads out loud, and others sew or knit. . . . Or we talk about raising children. Sometimes one woman sincerely ‘points out’ mistakes of another woman, explains them. We also talk about marital issues, we discuss them. This does a lot of good. Because after all in many families the situation is bad and it is hard for women who do not have warm-hearted smart advice. Sometimes we even have to say a few bitter words of truth to a woman, who is letting herself down, and her home is dirty, and her children are poorly raised, and later she cries that her husband stopped loving her. It is not at all always the man’s fault that a marriage ‘is falling apart.’ The reverse also happens. In the chapter, we also share household experiences: how to cook something, how to plan a family budget most sensibly. Because as you know—there are homes where for the first course (they have) cake, and before the first course, dry potatoes. Besides this, we help each other with cultivating our community gardens, which most residences of the apartment building have.¹¹⁷

In another chapter within the same community, members took turns walking children to and from the preschool and helped each other with daily shopping for groceries.¹¹⁸ Błochowa’s words provide rich information about the meaning of the League for members. Coming together as women meant more than socializing. It was also a forum for discussing serious problems, providing advice (whether wanted or not) and assistance, and most important, according to Błochowa, offering women close friendships. “I believe,” she continued, “that it is precisely in this type of everyday friendships and cooperation that the significance of the League’s chapters’ work lies, and not only [formal] meetings.”¹¹⁹ For her, the League’s formal activism was less meaningful than these informal and often spontaneous female get-togethers.

Other members likewise viewed these personal friendships as important. For Helena P. the organization was “one big family,” and women in a Krosno chapter claimed that “the women who come feel like family here.”¹²⁰ Helena P. believed that friendships became especially important for members of the Organization of Military Families, which provided its members with a network of women who supported each other during times of their husbands’ absences (often for a few months at a time).¹²¹ Members also gave women support in times of need; for example, when a neighbor or a friend was very poor or suddenly fell ill, League representatives went to her home, sometimes taking her to

¹¹⁷ “Rozmowy przedkongresowe,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1956): 4-17, quotation on 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹²⁰ Helena P., interview; and Krosno chapter members, interview by Banasiak “Czy tylko babskie gadanie?” Wanda K. and Danuta B. also mentioned the importance of friendships. Wanda K., interview; and Danuta B., interview.

¹²¹ Helena P., interview.

the doctor or hospital.¹²² Helena C. saw the League as a self-help organization through which women helped each other.¹²³

Numerous members expressed a sense of feeling needed and of satisfaction from helping others as meaningful benefits from their activism. The president of a Łódź factory chapter, for example, stated: “it makes me extremely happy when I could help people and when I could do something good.”¹²⁴ Helena P. agreed: “I found enjoyment” in the League. “When I was able . . . to help someone, it was truly great joy for me, great satisfaction.”¹²⁵ Zofia K. felt “great satisfaction” because she worked among people and was appreciated by those she helped.¹²⁶ Irena H. conveyed “personal satisfaction” with being able to help women and especially in seeing satisfaction from the women she assisted; and Kazimiera C. “always had satisfaction from this work. . . . I always had some feelings of gratification from what I did.”¹²⁷ Wanda K. believed that “I not only gave of myself [to the organization], but I also needed it.”¹²⁸ Łęcznarowiczowa felt greatest satisfaction when someone told her that they appreciated her assistance.¹²⁹ Bożena N., the current Central Administration office director, asserted: “I think that as long as I have the strength [and] capabilities, I will definitely work within this organization, because the work is difficult, but it gives tremendous satisfaction.” Even though she and the current president, Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, are often intensely exhausted from their work, “when someone comes in and candidly and kindly thanks us,” stating that because of the organization, “they found themselves, that they found their place in life, our spirits are risen, . . . [and we] get this force to continue functioning.”¹³⁰ Although most women expressed both positive and

¹²² Marysia P., interview.

¹²³ Helena C., interview.

¹²⁴ Rido-Zo., “Szyjemy za 150 zł,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 11 (September 1946): 14.

¹²⁵ Helena P., interview. Other members also discussed their satisfaction and joy in helping other women. Danuta B., interview; Urszula P., interview; and Barbara K., interview.

¹²⁶ Zofia K., interview.

¹²⁷ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000; and Kazimiera C., interview.

¹²⁸ Wanda K., interview.

¹²⁹ Łęcznarowiczowa, interview.

¹³⁰ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

negative aspects of living and functioning as an organization within a party-state, most also recalled their personal activism favorably. They remembered the organization “warmly,” as “good and enjoyable,” “energetic,” and “sincere.”¹³¹ These members chose to participate in the League at least partly because of these benefits that they attributed to it.

For their work within the organization, members often received some recognition either from League administrations or from local and national party bodies. According to Danuta B., women were excited about receiving these distinctions—“this made women happy.”¹³² Party leaders “arrived from the province [provincial party administration], they delivered [the awards]. . . . There were representatives from the [provincial] Committee. There were representatives from other factories. And they listened. You come out like an actress, an artist, to the podium. . . . They say your name, you come out. . . . This was enjoyable.”¹³³ Being recognized by upper-level League and party officials heightened these members’ sense of self-importance in a political system that largely focused on collectivity.

The League also provided women with entertainment. The organization, for example, often organized dances as a source of fundraising, arranged various artistic performances at larger gatherings (particularly for Mother’s Day and International Women’s Day), and offered discussions with well-known authors and poets. Some chapters even organized their own sports clubs, theater and dance troupes, chess and poetry clubs, and choirs.¹³⁴ Opole member Leokadia Ś. often organized artistic and cooking competitions for rural women.¹³⁵ One of the more popular activities was field trips for women

¹³¹ Helena P., interview; Kazimiera C., interview; Danuta B., interview; Marysia P., interview; and Wanda K., interview.

¹³² Danuta B., interview.

¹³³ Danuta B., interview. Marysia P. shared similar sentiments regarding her national recognition for party activism. Paczosa likewise expressed this honor in a poem and song. “Kronika 1975-1976 (Krowodrza).”

¹³⁴ “Dziecko,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 4 (February 1947): 9; “Sprawozdanie: Z działalności Zarządu Powiatowego Ligi Kobiet Nowa Huta od dnia 15 sierpnia 1950 roku”; Aniela Daszewska, “Hej, Idziemy tutaj z wiejską robotą,” *Kobieta dzisiejsza*, no. 12 (September 1947): 9-10; ZW LK, Łódź, *25 lat Ligi Kobiet: 25 lat działalności Ligi Kobiet województwa Łódzkiego, 1945-1970* (Łódź: WDE, 1970), 19, File “Liga Kobiet, 1968,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN; “Liga Kobiet przy pracy,” *Kobieta*, no. 11 (February 1948): 5; Jaruga-Nowacka, interview; Barbara K., interview; and Leokadia Ś., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000. This is more along the lines of what the Circles of Rural Housewives did. These Circles often performed traditional folk dancing and singing in urban areas.

¹³⁵ Leokadia Ś., interview.

to local historical sites, movie theaters, or concert halls.¹³⁶ In one local chapter, members ventured on weekly trips in and around Kraków to such sites as Auschwitz, museums, and the Wawel Castle.¹³⁷ Helena C. frequently organized trips to the opera and theater for women in her workplace. For many, it was the first time that they went to see such a performance, she stated.¹³⁸ These leisure activities gave women an opportunity to enjoy an afternoon or evening away from home, typically without husbands and children, in the company of their female friends.

Some women, particularly leaders on the national and provincial levels, traveled to other parts of the country as well as other parts of the world as delegates to various conferences. Approximately every four years, the League held a national conference in Warsaw where delegates from all over Poland came to elect the next officeholders, assess past activities, and plan for the future. Other national and regional conferences and seminars were held more often. During these gatherings, women not only had to sit through (often “extremely stiff” as Irena H. stated)¹³⁹ official proceedings, but they also spent time with other delegates over meals, tea, and coffee, as well as during outings around the city and performances. For many delegates, this was often the only opportunity that they had to travel without their families.

More prominent members, as representatives of Poland’s women’s organization, traveled abroad to visit other women’s groups, particularly in the socialist world, to exchange ideas and experiences about successes and failures. They also participated in various gatherings of the Women’s International Democratic Federation, of which the League was a member.¹⁴⁰ As Bożena N. stated, these trips were quite enjoyable and educational for the women involved. Women were able to explore other regions of the world while exchanging ideas about womanhood with women from other cultures. She

¹³⁶ “Sprawozdanie: Z wykonania planu pracy za III-ci kwartał 51 Zarządu Pow. Ligi Kobiet w Nowej Hucie,” 1951, File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-15, AAN; “Kronika 1975-1976 (Krowodrza);” Marysia P., interview; and Zofia K., interview. The Organization of Military Families also organized trips for women to see their husbands where they were stationed. Helena P., interview.

¹³⁷ “Kronika 1975-1976 (Krowodrza).”

¹³⁸ Helena C., interview.

¹³⁹ Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

¹⁴⁰ Irena H., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000; Urszula P., interview; and Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000. League documents and bulletins were filled with information about trips to other countries or visits from women’s organizations from other countries.

also noted, however, that in her opinion, trips to the Soviet Union were of a different nature; these meetings were intended not for sharing information but for teaching and guiding Polish women and showing them that Soviet women and society were ideal. Hosts showed Polish delegates either only the best of what they had or they even made it appear that their facilities (such as preschools, for example) were top quality. But, in fact, she added, if one wandered off on one's own, the true image of the Soviet Union emerged. Through these visits, she had realized that in many ways Poland was far ahead of the Soviet Union.¹⁴¹ Generally, these national and international trips, although often political and propagandistic, did provide women with camaraderie and relaxation. They expanded the female social space to national and international levels.

The League offered numerous benefits for women who participated in its activities and programs. It offered an escape for socializing, allowing groups of women to come together away from husbands, bosses, and children while taking courses, attending meetings, or participating in organized activities. It provided members with personal satisfaction in helping others and recognition by authorities for their voluntary work. And, it gave leaders opportunities to travel throughout the country and abroad not only to attend formal meetings but also to explore other regions of the world and exchange ideas about women's issues.

Conclusion

Although the League of Women, as an official women's organization functioning during the communist period in Poland, was undoubtedly closely connected to the Communist Party, it also provided something beneficial to the women who chose to take advantage of its programs and the women who chose to become its members. Home economics courses offered women useful information on traditionally female domestic responsibilities. Social-legal clinics and the League's roles as intermediary between the state and women aided women especially with legal issues. League gatherings provided a space in which to socialize and build friendships. And, assistance for other women gave members a sense of feeling needed. Sometimes the League served two purposes at once—supporting state policy and helping women. At times, assisting women meant challenging the party-state, as, for example, through letters on behalf of women during the 1980s crisis. Other instances, such

¹⁴¹ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

as the promotion of less meat consumption, could be interpreted as aiding both constituents. The League had a complex relationship with the party and women, and it carved out a semi-autonomous space that worked for both. Examining these relationships points to the need to explore the gray area of the communist period. These relationships will be further explored in the next chapter on signs of the League's "resistance" as well as members' attempts at developing their own meaning and initiatives for the organization.

CHAPTER 5

MEMBERS SPEAK OUT: NEGOTIATIONS AND RESISTANCE

If today we sometimes come across voices, that the women's organization has become outdated, then their source is precisely from [the] stiff, inflexible structure that the organization has been pushed into. In my opinion, the women's organization is still tremendously needed. But after the Congress it has to be thoroughly reorganized. It has to be changed from a 'dresser with dozens of drawers' into a lively, free organization, shaped by women's needs and by women themselves.¹

Elżbieta Tatarów-Słomiana, a delegate chosen for the *II Ogólnopolski Kongres Kobiet* (Second All-Polish Congress of Women) and an active League member from Kraków, expressed these views during pre-congress discussions in 1956 in *Nasza praca*. She criticized the League for being "inflexible" and for employing an "iron-centralism," whereby the Central Administration expected local chapters strictly to adhere to its directives. She argued that the group should withdraw from its involvement in a wide range of issues, which she referred to as an "alarming 'all-ism'" and a "'dresser with dozens of drawers,'" and focus specifically on women's everyday needs. She suggested that not only the Central Administration but also the party had "pushed" the League into this type of activism. Although some women advocated a total disbanding of the organization, Tatarów-Słomiana maintained that the League should continue to function, albeit after a thorough reorganization.² Her words are one example of the general sentiment among women who participated in discussions prior to the congress in the midst of destalinization in Poland.

This newfound expression of dissatisfaction with and desire to change the League emerged at a time when Poles, including party members and leaders—and to some extent people throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—exhibited similar views. These changes began shortly after Stalin's death in March 1953 and escalated especially in 1956 following Khrushchev's famous secret

¹ "Rozmawiamy z delegatkami na kongres," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 8.

² *Ibid.*

speech in February, in which he condemned the “cult of personality” and revealed Stalin’s crimes. Party officials in Poland began to denounce stalinist-era “errors and distortions,” to call for candidness and openness, and to debate about the state’s future. In so doing, they did not criticize socialist ideology but their own activism, and they did not seek to dismantle the socialist system but rather to revise or repair it, often referring to it as a “new course,” a “renewal,” or “Poland’s road to socialism.” Factions among party leaders developed, with each group devising its own direction for the “new course.” The two most visible groups within the party—the *Natolin* group characterized as hardliners or Polish Stalinists and the *Pulawy* group, consisting of the younger generation and intellectuals within the party who called for greater democratization within Poland—sought to gain power in the changing climate.³ “Poland’s road to socialism,” however, could only go as far as Soviet officials allowed it. In October 1956, Soviet tanks moved toward Warsaw to quell the disturbances. Poland was more fortunate than Hungary. Soviet troops destroyed parts of Budapest, and following a trial, Imre Nagy, Hungary’s popular leader, was executed along with other leaders.

Calls for renewal emerged not only within the party but also from citizens at large. Workers called for greater control, decentralization, and self-management within the workplace; they gained some autonomy for a brief period through the newly formed workers’ councils.⁴ The Church gained greater acceptance among party ranks.⁵ Agricultural collectivization halted, and farmers regained control over private farms.⁶ Following popular demonstrations through which Poles expressed their

³ On factions and disputes within the party, see, for example, Jakub Karpiński, *Countdown: The Polish Upheavals of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 . . .*, trans. Olga Amsterdamska and Gene M. Moore. (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishers, Inc., 1982), 53-66; Andrzej Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski, 1939-1989* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAN, 1996), 326-38, Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, trans. Jane Cave (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 270-72; and Zbysław Rykowski and Wiesław Władyka, *Polska próba Październik '56* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989), 195-213.

⁴ Dariusz Jarosz, “Robotnicy ‘56-‘57: Czy rozczarowanie komunizmem?” in *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2001), 325-37; George Kolankiewicz, “The Polish Industrial Manual Working Class,” in *Social Groups in Polish Society*, ed. David Lane and George Kolankiewicz (London: Macmillan, 1973), 88-151; and David R. Stefancic, *Robotnik: A Short History of the Struggle for Worker Self-Management and Free Trade Unions in Poland, 1944-1981* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1992), chap. 1.

⁵ Andrzej Friszke, “Przystosowanie i opór: Rozważania nad postawami społecznymi 1956-1970,” in *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, 138-55.

⁶ Dariusz Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948-1956 a chłopci* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1998), 150-54.

growing dissatisfaction with the state and demands for change by party elites, media exhibited more openness, cultural freedom expanded, and Poland underwent a gradual relaxation in repressive policies and acts.⁷ In the process, even the population at large did not demand a complete turn away from socialism, but a new direction with the rehabilitation and reinstatement of Władysław Gomułka to party secretary. Under stalinism, Gomułka had been evicted from the party and arrested for allegedly anticommunist attitudes and directly defying Stalin especially as related to agricultural collectivization.

The year 1956 marked a significant turning point for the League as well. The organization began to promote “open” and “honest” debates about the group’s past and, more important, about its direction for the future. Women expressed their personal goals for the organization, criticized the League’s activities and political tendencies under stalinism, and demanded a new focus on practical issues. For the following ten years more than at any other time in its history, members most actively and openly implemented their own ideas and programs, expressed views about women’s position, and even resisted, or at the very least showed dissatisfaction toward, official party policy. In comparison to the stalinist period, members possessed more possibilities in expressing their views, yet this “openness” and “honesty” was limited. Like party leaders, League members generally did not question socialism or the party’s hegemonic position. Instead, they examined and criticized their own activism in the previous period and debated about the direction of the group’s future within the socialist system. Even with these limitations, in the process, the organization emerges as a lively and changing group whose members were interested in revising and repairing their activism to correlate more directly with what they recognized as women’s everyday needs.

These types of changes were not unique to the League. Other groups within and outside Poland likewise experienced significant transformations. The Union of Polish Youth gradually disintegrated, and new groups, most of which were affiliated with the party, were formed, thereby

⁷ On the crisis surrounding 1956, see especially Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski*, pts. 4-5; Wiesław Władyka, *Październik 56* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1994); Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crisis in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (1998): 163-214; Karpiński, *Countdown*, esp. chap. 2; Antoni Dudek and Tomasz Marszałkowski, *Walki uliczne w PRL, 1956-1989* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Geo, 1999), chap. 1; and Rykowski and Władyka, *Polska próba*.

ending “the period of complete uniformity in the official youth movement.”⁸ The Union of Combatants for Freedom and Democracy grew in membership and became more spontaneous and lively. Its members openly began to discuss the group’s future within the state and to combine “communist with nationalist heroism.”⁹ Outside of Poland, activists of the Czechoslovak women’s commissions started to criticize past forms of activism and introduced new directions for future work. By the late 1950s, however, the commissions returned to the same focus on economic issues that women had criticized in 1956 and 1957.¹⁰ In Hungary, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women changed its name to the National Council of Hungarian Women and was reorganized in 1956.¹¹ And, in Romania the Democratic Women’s Organization became the National Women’s Council and established stronger ties to the party.¹²

The League’s openness persisted until 1966, when the party decided forcibly to reorganize the group by abolishing workplace chapters and consequently regained much of its control over the organization.¹³ As historian Timothy Garton Ash has written, Gomułka’s rise to power “proved to be not the beginning of a new period of democratisation in and through the Party, of rational economic reform, cultural liberalisation and increased respect for human and civil rights, but rather the beginning of the end of that happy ferment of ‘renewal’ which effervesced across Poland in the autumn of

⁸ Karpiński, *Countdown*, esp. 86-88, quotation on 88. See also Bogdan Hillebrandt, *Polskie organizacje młodzieżowe, XIX i XX wieku: Zarys historii* (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1986), 271-315.

⁹ Joanna Wawrzyniak, “Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację: Ewolucja ideologii a więź grupowa,” in *PRL: Trwanie i zmiana*, ed. Dariusz Stola and Marcin Zaremba (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania im. Leona Koźmińskiego, 2003), 351-72, quotation on 358.

¹⁰ Sharon L. Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality: The Status of Women in Eastern Europe” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980), 325-28.

¹¹ Éva Fodor, “Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary,” *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (April 2002): 240-63, esp. 249, n. 8.

¹² Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 109.

¹³ In contrast, in 1967, the Union of Czechoslovak Women was reinstated after fifteen years of its non-existence. While Poland was becoming more repressive under Gomułka’s leadership and women’s issues were losing credence, Czechoslovakia was increasingly moving toward reform. Reinstating the women’s organization and thereby making women’s issues important was part of that reform movement. Wolchik, “Politics, Ideology, and Equality,” chap. 7; and Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 114-15.

1956.”¹⁴ The “happy ferment” ended quickly. By the early 1960s, Gomułka had lost significant legitimacy and had become more rigid and authoritarian. He increasingly instituted new restrictive policies and heightened censorship, tactics that eventually led to the 1968 protests by students and intellectuals, calling for political reform and cultural freedom.¹⁵ In 1958, about eighteen months after their formation, the semi-autonomous workers’ councils lost authority, centralization within the workplace increased, and workers once again became disillusioned.¹⁶ By the middle of that year, censorship increased, publications decreased, and some journals were forced to dissolve.¹⁷ In 1965, the plurality of the youth movement was called into question when one organization, the *Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich* (Association of Polish Students) called for the formation of a single group; a federation was finally formed in 1973.¹⁸ The 1966 decision reorganizing the League was one of the numerous repressive measures that the party leadership implemented prior to the 1968 events to gain greater control.

Following the 1966 resolution, the League withdrew to the shadows, losing many members as well as popular legitimacy. Not until the early 1980s during the economic and political crisis in Poland did its members again turn to candid discussions about the organization and women’s issues. The League’s actions reflected broader social trends. Poles in general and workers in particular engaged in frank discussions and attempted to redefine their relationship to the state. Worker unrest was not new in

¹⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984), 10.

¹⁵ On the March 1968 events, see Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec 1968* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), Jerzy Eisler, “March 1968 in Poland,” in *1968: The World Transformed*, ed. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1998): 237-251; Karpiński, *Countdown*, chap. 3; and Dudek and Marszałkowski, *Walki uliczne w PRL*, chap. 3. On Gomułka’s downfall, see Nicholas Bethell, *Gomułka: His Poland, His Communism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), chaps. 16-17.

¹⁶ On these workplace developments, see Kolankiewicz, “Polish Industrial Manual Working Class”; Jarosz, “Robotnicy ‘56-‘57””; and Stefancic, *Robotnik*, chap. 1.

¹⁷ Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski*, 328-30.

¹⁸ Bogdan Hillebrandt, “Stołeczna organizacja ZMS,” in *Postępowe organizacje młodzieżowe w Warszawie, 1864-1956*, ed. Bogdan Hillebrandt (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 250-82, esp. 280-81.

Poland,¹⁹ but the 1980s witnessed the eruption of hundreds of strikes, calling for economic and, later, political reform; the formation of the first national free trade union—the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”—within the Eastern bloc; and the development of negotiations between party officials and workers.²⁰ Even the party participated in a renewal (*odnowa*).²¹ Following the general mood within Poland, League members once more attempted to redefine their organization in terms of its goals, methods and location of activism, and relationship to the party. Unlike women activists in Solidarity and the underground movement who stressed rights for all, members focused on issues related specifically to women.²²

In this chapter, I assess three moments of the League’s history in which members most directly examined, negotiated, and contested the organization’s role for women. I first explore the discussions that took place in *Nasza praca* in the mid-1950s in preparation for the women’s congress

¹⁹ See especially Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Małgorzata Fidelis, “Reinventing Gender: Women Industrial Workers and the State in Postwar Poland, 1945-1956” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, in process).

²⁰ Scholars have given significant attention to the 1980s in Poland, and more specifically to Solidarity. See, for example, Ireneusz Krzemiński, *Solidarność: Projekt polskiej demokracji* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1997); Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Arista Maria Cirtautas, *The Polish Solidarity Movement: Revolution, Democracy, and Natural Rights* (London: Routledge, 1997); Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland’s Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), Jadwiga Staniszkis, *The Dynamics of the Breakthrough in Eastern Europe: The Polish Experience*, trans. Chester A. Kisiel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); and William Dan Perdue, *Paradox of Change: The Rise and Fall of Solidarity in the New Poland* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995).

²¹ Many Poles continued to believe that reform was possible, but others claimed that the party was moving in the same old direction. As Stefancic so aptly put it: “the term ‘*odnowa*’ has two popular meanings; renewal and the same old thing, the Party had opted for the latter,” while many Poles had chosen the former definition. Stefancic, Robotnik, 78.

²² As Shana Penn has argued, women activists in the 1980s focused their activism on rights for all and most did not recognize women’s subordinate position. Shana Penn, *Podziemie kobiet*, trans. Hanna Jankowska (Warsaw: Rosner and Wspólnicy, 2003). Other sources on women in Solidarity and the underground movement include Ewa Kondratowicz, *Szminka na sztandarze: Kobiety Solidarności, 1980-1989, rozmowy* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2001); Belinda Brown, *The Private Revolution: Women in the Polish Underground Movement* (London: Hera Trust, 2003); Kristi S. Long, *We All Fought for Freedom: Women in Poland’s Solidarity Movement* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996); Anna Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity, and Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 1992); and Małgorzata Tarasiewicz, “Kobiety w NSZZ Solidarność,” *Pełnym głosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 30-33.

and during the conference.²³ Then, I focus on the League's frequent organizational shifts in urban areas between functioning solely in residential areas and functioning in both places of residence and employment. Although these changes took place four times in the League's history, I center my discussion on the transformations in 1956 and 1966, years in which the League and its members displayed the most resistance and independence with regard to these shifts. Finally, I examine the League's renewed expression of frustration and dissatisfaction in the early 1980s. All three of these periods demonstrate members' desire for the League to represent women and define their organization based on women's needs and members' perspectives. The discussions and actions that ensued demonstrate that the League was not a monolithic organization that suppressed women's views. It at times provided a forum in which women were able to take part in determining how and where the group functioned.

Women Voicing their Opinions: Criticism and “Practical Activism” in the mid-1950s

Demands for honesty, the unveiling of lies, and candidness rang out throughout Eastern Europe by both party members and citizens at large. In early 1956, the League started to prepare for the women's congress by promoting open and inclusive discussions at local meetings and in its national bulletin.²⁴ Discussants called for openness, truth, and sincerity, indicating their awareness of propaganda, false information, and deception during the stalinist period. In the words of Helena

²³ The congress initially had been planned for 1956 but did not occur until July 1957, probably in large part due to the unexpected events of the Polish October in 1956. The name of the congress also changed. The first national meeting of the organization, which took place in 1951, was named the *I Ogólnopolski Kongres Ligi Kobiet* (First All-Polish League of Women Congress); whereas, the planned name for the 1956 gathering was the Second All-Polish Women Congress, indicating that it was to incorporate all women rather than only the organization's members. Interestingly, however, the name of the meeting that finally took place—*II Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet* (Second National League of Women Conference)—in July 1957 differed from the planned title. (*Zjazd* can be translated as congress or conference, but here I use conference to differentiate between the wording.) Like its predecessor, the meeting was thus designated for the League of Women rather than the initially intended inclusion of all women. It is unclear why the organization decided to alter the name.

²⁴ Prior to all of its national conferences, which occurred approximately every four to five years, the League organized local meetings to plan an agenda for national gatherings and allow women throughout Poland, not only conference delegates and League leaders, to express their needs and wishes. Delegates to the national conferences were to bring these local concerns to the national meeting. Delegates were not only League members, but many also represented various sectors, such as industry, politics, and medicine. The party secretary as well as other party functionaries typically attended and spoke to the delegates about state goals and women's role within those plans.

Dworakowska, a Central Administration member, the debates were to “uncover . . . numerous bitter truths to get rid of everything that was hampering our work.”²⁵ Arguing that the organization needed to be more truthful, Mackiewicz, secretary of the League’s Łódź city administration, stated outright that the League previously had forbidden her to “speak or write the truth” when she attempted to express her views about women’s position. She had been directed to “write enthusiastic statements” only and noted: “I will admit, that this appalled me.”²⁶ In the opinion of these women, lies and deception impeded the issues that were and continued to be most important to women.

In contrast to most other periods of the League’s history, during pre-congress gatherings members also advocated spontaneity. At a meeting in Warsaw, for example, following some longwinded discussions, a woman suggested that speakers limit their presentations to fifteen minutes. Her proposal led to an uproar from the audience. ““This meeting is held in order for us to state everything to the end, what grudges we have”—the women cried out—“The Congress must know everything about our issues.””²⁷ They insisted that women’s voices be heard without any restrictions, implying what was obvious to all—that their voices previously had been suppressed.

Demands for frankness and honesty resulted in discussions about League problems. A frequent criticism that women brought to the table centered on the organization’s “*wszystkoizm*” (all-ism), a term that numerous discussants utilized to demonstrate that the League’s agenda was too extensive.²⁸ Especially during the stalinist period, the Central Administration often directed chapters to “*włączyć się*” (to become involved with or join) a wide range of state activities and organizations, such as the *Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Radzieckiej* (Society for Polish-Soviet Friendship) and *Związek*

²⁵ “Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1956): 3-6, quotation on 4.

²⁶ “Dyskusja,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 7-18, quotation on 15.

²⁷ “Trzy konferencje—dziesiątki problemów: Z warszawskich narad przedkongresowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 30-33, quotation on 33.

²⁸ For some examples of the use of this term and criticism of the League’s overextension, see “Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet,” 4; “Dyskutujemy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1956): 16-17; “Rozmawiamy z delegatkami na kongres”; and “Na tropie spraw zaniedbanych: W czterech ścianach domu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 9-12. This is by no means a unique criticism of the League or communist-era women’s organizations. Members of the National Organization for Women in the United States also have criticized their organization for taking on too many issues. Stephanie Gilmore, personal correspondence, May 2002. As national organizations attempting to represent various groups of women, it is not surprising that both groups encountered this criticism.

Samopomocy Chlopskiej (Peasants' Self-Help Association), many of which had little or nothing to do with women or women's issues specifically.²⁹ In Tatarów-Słomiana's opinion, by embracing too many and such varied issues, about many of which League members were not knowledgeable, the organization ended up not "dealing with any carefully or thoroughly."³⁰ Women did not want the organization to do "everything and nothing," one woman stated. "We do not want continually to 'join' every action that various organizations and institutions take. We do not want to scatter our work into dozens of minor issues."³¹ The League's involvement in and with such a wide range of programs and organizations led to a recognition among women that the group lost sight of what was most important to women. Rather than spend its time and effort on women's everyday problems—particularly dealing with employment, raising children, and household responsibilities—the organization wasted its energy on these less relevant and peripheral activities.

For the first time, League leaders criticized the group's relationship with the party and claimed that the organization had placed too much emphasis on adhering to the party line and politics and too little on women. Even the Central Administration's resolution from the end of the year declared that the organization had followed a "one-sided activism, which by taking up political-educational work, did not defend women's interests to a satisfactory degree."³² Zuzanna Cwiklińska, a Central Administration member, and Mackiewicz criticized the League's role as a transmitter between the party and women. Cwiklińska maintained that the group was an increasingly "weaker transmission to the masses of women, because it had detached itself from" them. In her opinion, instead of transmitting information **from** the party **to** women, the League should do exactly the opposite: it should relay information **from** women about women's situation **to** the party.³³ Mackiewicz disagreed with Cwiklińska's assessment of

²⁹ One woman claimed that the League was even asked to "join" in teaching riflery. See "Aktyw lubelski dyskutuje: Organizacja kobieca czy ruch kobiecy," *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 34-36.

³⁰ "Rozmawiamy z delegatkami na kongres," 8. For other criticisms of "joining," see "Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet"; "Dyskutujemy"; "Aktyw lubelski dyskutuje"; and "Rozmowy przedkongresowe," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1956): 4-17.

³¹ "Dyskutujemy," 17.

³² "Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 1-3, quotation on 2.

³³ "Dyskusja," 13.

the League's detachment from women and instead placed the blame directly on the party. She claimed that members "had not had the right to discuss" the issues that women broached. As the party's access to women, "we had to blindly transmit what the party directed us to transmit to the masses."³⁴ Both women indicated that the League's relationship to the party needed to be transformed after the congress. They called for a new approach that brought women and their issues to center stage and gave women and their organization the power to voice their opinions and needs.

Women also condemned the organization for being too static, dull, and passive. "We have not been an aggressive, combative organization," claimed Maria Aszkenazy, Central Administration secretary.³⁵ The 1956 League resolution reiterated her views: the League lacked a "combative spirit" and exhibited "timidity. . . in demanding changes." The group "lost characteristics of a lively social organization, one which relied on women's initiative."³⁶ Women desired a more assertive organization whose members actively pursued women's rights and fought for alleviating their hardships, rather than a group that stood on the sidelines waiting for directives from above, as the League had largely done up to that point. Instead of acting as passive recipients of information from officials, they wanted to be active subjects, formulating their own opinions about women's issues and providing their ideas regarding women's needs and problems to the party and advocating policy changes.

The criticism of an "iron-centralism" that Tatarów-Słomiana presented emerged from numerous women.³⁷ The call for an organization that was less centralized and dogmatic, and one that allowed local initiative, illustrates that even within a highly centralized socialist state, members of state-affiliated organizations desired decentralization.³⁸ Calls for decentralization rang out in various sectors. Party members advocated a "Polish road to socialism" as opposed to a common road that all

³⁴ Ibid., 15.

³⁵ Maria Aszkenazy, "Z czym idziemy na kongres?" *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (October 1956): 1-3, quotation on 2.

³⁶ "Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," 2.

³⁷ "Rozmawiamy z delegatkami na kongres," 8; "Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet"; "Dyskusja"; and ZGLK, "Do Zarządów Wojewódzkich, Powiatowych i Miejskich, do kół Ligi Kobiet, do kół Gospodyń ZSCh, do wszystkich członkiń Ligi Kobiet w mieście i na wsi," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 3-4.

³⁸ Criticism of centralism is not unique to the Polish women's group. The National of Organization of Women in the United States also had problems with central versus regional authority. Stephanie Gilmore, personal correspondence, May 2002.

communist countries were to follow according to Soviet prescriptions. Workers demanded greater control of the workplace, leading to the creation of the short-lived semi-autonomous workers' councils. Youth called for an expansion of the youth movement; the Union of Polish Youth slowly disintegrated, while numerous new youth groups were formed.

League members sought their own local and semi-independent road to dealing with women's issues regionally rather than follow directives from the center. Chapters, noted one woman, no longer wanted to be "led by the hand" by the Central Administration and instead wanted to make their own decisions.³⁹ Even top League leaders agreed that the relationship between national and local initiatives needed to become more balanced. Dworakowska, for example, contended that the "wave of messages flowing from the Central Administration . . . produced certain routines and indifference within provincial administrations," thereby covering up women's issues. While she recognized the need for the center to provide some basic guidelines to regional chapters, she opposed the typical "flood of instructions, . . . [and] minute directives." Furthermore, the Central Administration, she claimed, no longer wanted to deal with specific regional issues.⁴⁰

Although Alicja Musiałowa had been central to the League's stalinist past and had openly supported and promoted the official party line, in the midst of the pre-congress discussions and especially during the actual national gathering, she changed her tune to reflect the voices of the women she led. Musiałowa may have altered her views because of a sincere belief in the new road or as a way to retain her leadership position. Unlike party secretary Edward Ochab, who lost his position to Gomułka, the League's president was able to bridge the two periods by promoting changes. Musiałowa agreed with Dworakowska's sentiments and stated that the League should "more consistently and persistently" move in the direction of allowing local administrations and individual chapters more independence. She acknowledged that women's needs varied regionally and therefore many of their problems should be solved locally rather than nationally, and she recognized that the practice of directing chapters led to a weakening of the organization.⁴¹

³⁹ "Dyskusja," 7.

⁴⁰ "Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet," 4.

⁴¹ Alicja Musiałowa, "Codzienne sprawy kobiet—to treść dalszej pracy naszej organizacji," *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 4-7, quotation on 6. See also Alicja Musiałowa, 206

By ending the practice of “joining,” changing its one-sided relationship to the party, becoming more combative, and allowing greater autonomy to local chapters and administrations, the League, the discussants claimed, would finally be able to focus its attention on issues that were most important to women—predominantly issues dealing with combining motherhood, housework, and employment. The demand for greater emphasis on “practical activism” emerged repeatedly, showing that women (including League leaders) were aware that by following the party line and engaging in spreading official propaganda the organization had overlooked women’s needs and desires during the stalinist period. In a piece entitled “Women’s everyday issues—the essence of our organization’s further activism,” Musiałowa stressed that this was the group’s most pertinent future direction.⁴² At the national conference, she stated that the League had been too timid and inconsistent in putting forth women’s demands to authorities. The organization had focused its attention on handling specific complaints and needs of individual women and overlooked all “women’s everyday lives and their traditionally burdensome responsibilities as housewives, wives, and mothers.” Over the past few years, she continued, the League had focused on propaganda work and political meetings, rather than on assisting women as it had done in the earliest years of its existence (in the immediate postwar period). She added that the League had retreated from these issues due to the mistaken understanding that all “social needs were supposed to be satisfied by the state.”⁴³ Socialist ideology stressed that the state was to provide social services for its citizens, in part as a means to emancipate women from household responsibilities. Communal services, however, gained little popularity in Poland, and by 1956, not only the League but also the party departed from an emphasis on state-sponsored services.⁴⁴ In accordance

“Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej wygłoszony na II Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet,” in *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet (materiały): Warszawa, 11-13 lipiec 1957r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1957), 3-19 esp. 16.

⁴² Musiałowa, “Codzienne sprawy kobiet.”

⁴³ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” 7.

⁴⁴ On the lack of popularity among Poles for communal services, see Helena Strzemińska, “Czas wolny rodzin pracowniczych i ich potrzeby w zakresie rozwoju usług,” in *Socjalne i prawne środki ochrony macierzyństwa i rodziny*, ed. Danuta Graniewska (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1976), 336-62. By the late 1930s, the Soviet Union likewise retreated from collectivity to a focus on individual responsibility. See, for example, Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

with this retreat, Musiałowa underscored the need for entities other than the state (e.g., the League) to provide for women's needs.

One of the fundamental needs that members stressed was equality between women and men. Especially during the immediate postwar and stalinist periods, the League promoted Poland's preliminary Constitution, introduced in 1947, which gave women equal opportunity in employment and education as well as the longer and more detailed 1952 Constitution based on its Soviet counterpart, which stated that women had equal rights with men in public, political, economic, social, and cultural life, including equal opportunity to work and fair compensation.⁴⁵ Socialism claimed to guarantee equality between the sexes by alleviating many of women's familial and domestic responsibilities and placing them in the hands of the state and by giving women constitutional equal rights.⁴⁶ With increasingly more women entering the workforce and benefiting from educational opportunities during stalinism, League members persistently turned to quantifiable measures as evidence that women were able to achieve equality with men under the socialist state. Furthermore, some claimed that women could only gain full equality through active participation in production.⁴⁷

In 1956, however, women for the first time started to acknowledge openly (and continue to do so to the present day) that equality in the Constitution did not guarantee equality in reality, a problem that the organization, they argued, should actively address. Members did not present a unified front. They showed their diverse views as well as their uneasiness in determining the definition of equality. Most agreed that equality did not exist in practice, that it should, and that it should be based on differences between the sexes. An attorney, Miernowska, underscored the importance of the League taking initiative in guaranteeing equality not just on paper but also in practice. "It is true," she stated, that the Constitution guaranteed equality between the sexes, "but the road from the Constitution to life

⁴⁵ *The Provisional Constitution of February 20, 1947 and the Declaration of Rights* (New York: Polish Research and Information Service, 1947); and Article 66, *Konstytucja Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej projekt uchwalony dnia 23 stycznia 1952 r.* (Warsaw: Komisja Konstytucyjna, 1952).

⁴⁶ Some scholars of Eastern European history have raised the question of whether or not socialism did indeed emancipate women. See, especially, Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women?*; and Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁴⁷ See, for example, "W 6-ą rocznicę Manifestu Lipcowego," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 6 (1950): 1-6; "Więcej kobiet do produkcji," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 7-8 (1950): 16-22; "Nasze osiągnięcia i trudności," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 5 (1950): 1-31; "Kobieta pracuje zawodowo," *Poznajmy prawdę*, no. 1 (1952): 3-28; and Alicja Musiałowa, "Zadania ruchu kobiecego w realizacji Planu 6-letniego," *Nasza praca*, no. 16 (October 1950): 3-21, esp. 5.

often is very far. . . . The Constitution is not everything. We still need to fight for numerous laws.”⁴⁸

The League’s inadequate emphasis on only one aspect of equality—equal right to employment—also figured in Musiałowa’s speech. In promoting only employment equal rights, the organization, she claimed, advocated women’s production for the country, “grand national objectives, [and] grand economic plans,” instead of for women and their families.⁴⁹ For women to garner equality in reality, some members stressed the need to alleviate some of women’s burdens, particularly those connected to domesticity and housework.⁵⁰ As one article stated so tellingly: “One of the conditions of women’s equality is to enable them to have an equal start to life with men by creating conditions that would ease women’s fulfillment of her double responsibilities: worker and mother/housewife.”⁵¹ Following the conference, the League also planned to address such issues of inequality as the lack of women in managerial positions, women’s unemployment problems, and work training for girls.⁵²

On the one hand, members openly began to advocate equality between the sexes, particularly in employment and education, but, on the other hand, they also emphasized differences, particularly in regard to combining employment and domestic responsibilities.⁵³ This simultaneous emphasis on

⁴⁸ “Aktyw lubelski dyskutuje,” 35.

⁴⁹ Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” 7.

⁵⁰ See, for example, “Nowinki z ‘Argedu,’” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (June 1956): 27; “Blżej codziennego życia kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 3-5; and Helena Dworakowska, “O jaki program chodzi . . .,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 7-8. Sociologists and economists in the 1960s were likewise examining the issue of equality for women. See, for example, Janina Waluk, “O płacy kobiet w Polsce,” in *Kobieta współczesna: Z badań socjologów, lekarzy, ekonomistów, pedagogów, i psychologów*, ed. Magdalena Sokołowska (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1966), 172-203, and Janina Waluk, *Płaca i praca kobiet w Polsce* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1965).

⁵¹ “Blżej codziennego życia kobiet,” 4.

⁵² “Uchwała: II Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet,” 22-23; and Musiałowa, “Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej,” esp. 9-10.

⁵³ Numerous scholars have examined the question of equality and difference. See especially, for example, Karen Offem, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 123-56, Karen Offem, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Joan W. Scott, “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (spring 1988): 35-50, Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Gisela Bock and Susan James, eds. *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 1992); Basia A. Nowak, “Equality in Difference: Propaganda and the Worker-Mother in Poland, 1966-1975” (M.A. thesis, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1998); Danuta Markowska, “Rola kobiety w polskiej rodzinie,” in *Kobiety polskie: Praca zbiorowa*, ed. Elżbieta Konecka (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), 184-224, 209

equality and difference was prominent not only for the League but also more generally for socialism.⁵⁴ Members called for such gendered privileges and changes as expanded protective legislation in the workforce, one free working day to do laundry and other household chores, shorter work weeks for mothers, extended maternity leave, and onsite gynecologists in workplaces that employed more than four hundred women.⁵⁵ Equality and difference emerged in discussions of discrimination against pregnant working women. Duszyńska, a female factory manager, for example, forcefully attacked the practice of not hiring women who might be or who were pregnant. Many managers, she argued, refused to hire these women for fear of not being able to fill their positions during their maternity leaves and consequently not being able to meet production goals. She asked forcefully: “Who is at fault?” She directly pointed the finger at the state for setting “such lofty plans.” If it were not for these unrealistic production goals, she implied, managers would not be as hesitant in hiring pregnant women. She continued: “Life is not a clause or directive. If we provide rights, which protect a working mother,” she argued, “then we must ensure that she has the possibility to fully realize these rights.” Production plans “should be more flexible in firms with a high percentage of female workers.”⁵⁶ In her assessment, women should not have been penalized for being pregnant. Instead, their legal rights as employees should have been met. At the same time, female workers, due to their differences from male workers, should have some flexibility in their work. Members promoted equality based on differences between women and men, and by no means attempted to overhaul the traditional gender system. Men continued to be typically viewed as primary breadwinners and women continued to be largely charged with household responsibilities and raising children, even those who were employed outside the home.

Equality also figured prominently in discussions about the possibility of disbanding the League altogether and creating a women’s movement in Poland instead. Members understood a

esp. 218-24; and various essays in Nannette Funk and Magda Mueller, eds., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵⁴ On a discussion of equality and difference in Poland during the 1960s and early 1970s, see, for example, Nowak, “Equality in Difference.”

⁵⁵ For some examples, see “Aktyw lubelski dyskutuje”; “Rozmowy przedkongresowe”; “Uchwała Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet”; “Głosy terenu,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 28-29, 38; “Trzy konferencje”; “W zakładach wytwórczych lamp elektrycznych im. Róży Luksemburg,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (September 1956): 13-15; and “Dyskusja.”

⁵⁶ “Trzy konferencje,” 33.

women's movement to mean that women had attained equality and as a result, an organization struggling for women's rights and needs was no longer necessary. In place of the League, a women's commission, like the ones formed in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, would function as women's representative internationally.⁵⁷ Secretary of the Poznań provincial administration, Zdrojewska, asked: "Should our organization exist, [or should it] become a movement?" Like most discussants, she maintained that the time was not yet ripe for becoming a movement, but indicated that a debate along these lines had been brewing among women. "Of course," she continued, "it would be easiest . . . to be satisfied with our already acquired attainments. But it is not yet time for this. We cannot become a movement yet."⁵⁸ Members stressed that equality had not been reached in practice, and thus women continued to need a separate women's organization. Pressure to dissolve may have come from some party leaders, but unlike the situation in the Soviet Union in 1930 and in Czechoslovakia in 1952 when women's groups were in fact disbanded, League members possessed enough power to keep their organization intact.

In this period of crisis in Polish history, members showed their commitment to the organization and to changing the manner in which it functioned. They exhibited a sense of ownership of the League and demanded a different relationship with the state. Women activists wanted to represent all women—workers, intellectuals, students, peasants—and, more important, to shape that representation based on what they deemed most crucial for women. At a time when Poles in general and even party leaders questioned and criticized the previous era, for the first time since the inception of stalinism, the League and its members likewise showed opposition and independence. Members opened up new discourse on behalf of women. These discussions were limited, but they were also significantly more open and lively than the discussions (or lack thereof) that took place during the stalinist period.

⁵⁷ The Union of Czechoslovak Women was disbanded in 1952 and the *Zhenotdel* was dissolved in 1930, when some argued that a women's organization was no longer needed. Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," chap. 6; Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women?* chap. 5; and Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 270-75.

⁵⁸ "Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet," 5. See also Aszkenazy, "Z czym idziemy na kongres?"; "Rozmawiamy z delegatkami na kongres"; and "Głosy terenu," 38.

Housewives and Working Women, Residential and Workplace Chapters: Growing Tensions in the 1950s

Members' active pursuit of control over League activism spilled into debates about where the League should function in the city—in places of residence (apartment buildings and residential areas) and/or in places of employment (establishments that employed many women). This was the most significant organizational change that women debated prior to the 1956 conference and again in the mid-1960s as well as the early 1980s. Not only did these debates center on the actual structural location of where the organization should function, but they also became a question of whom the organization was to represent, how best to organize that representation, and who was to represent working women. Discussions frequently resulted in and reflected tension and misunderstandings between working and nonworking women, all of whom wanted to take part in defining their organization, and revealed dissatisfaction with decisions made by party leaders.

The League designated residential groups for housewives as well as women employed in small firms where a workplace League did not exist and workplace chapters for working women at sites that employed many women, including hospitals, banks, schools, and especially “feminized” factories (such as textile plants). In residential areas, the League had spaces within apartment buildings (usually on the first floor) or within cultural centers where women gathered regularly, and in workplaces, women met at the worksite. Throughout its history, in urban areas the organization wavered between operating simultaneously in both types of chapters and solely in places of residence. In the first few years of its existence, the organization had circles in residential areas and workplaces.⁵⁹ In 1952 and 1953, party officials passed numerous resolutions to disband worksite groups and to focus only on residential circles. Sources provide vague reasons for this change, indicating that the League had not accomplished enough among housewives and rural women.⁶⁰ Party leaders may have thought

⁵⁹ SOLK, *Statut Społeczno-Obywatelskiej Ligi Kobiet* (Warsaw: SOLK, 1948), 7, File “Liga Kobiet, 1945-1950,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN.

⁶⁰ “Notatka Wydziału Kobiecego KC PZPR w sprawie zmiany kierownictwa Partii pracą wśród kobiet,” 29 September 1952, File “KC PZPR Wydział Kobiecycy,” sygn. 237/VX-3; “Uchwała Sekretariatu KC o zmianie form kierownictwa Partii pracą wśród kobiet,” 9 January 1953, File “KC PZPR Wydział Kobiecycy,” sygn. 237/XV-8; and “Uchwała Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie wzmocnienia i rozszerzenia pracy wśród kobiet,” June 1953, File “KC PZPR Wydział Propagandy i Agitacji,” sygn. 237/VIII-76, all in AAN. Interestingly, workplace chapters also dissolved in 1951 in

that this transformation would create greater access to the “backward” housewives who had been so difficult for the League and its *przodownice społeczne* to organize. Working women had other means by which to obtain official party information in the workplace. The disbanding of these chapters may have been an attempt to encourage working women to interact more closely with and influence “backward” housewives, thereby spreading official information even more directly than agitators. Women who did not work outside the home continued to be difficult to organize throughout the League’s history, and League publications repeatedly stressed the need to include more nonworking women in the organization.⁶¹ Housewives may have resisted attempts to strengthen residential chapters, because they may have seen it as an intrusion into the “private” sphere, which, as Barbara Einhorn has maintained, was “the only space for the development of individual initiative and autonomy.”⁶² The private sphere became the locus of political debate, tradition, freedom, and growing nationalism. Residential chapters may have been seen as coming too close to this symbolic space.

Documents and publications do not give evidence of resistance or even reaction to the change in the early 1950s. This absence may indicate that members at that time did not exhibit dissatisfaction with the policy due to fear of repercussions; were willing to experiment with a new manner of functioning; or showed signs of noncompliance, but sources did not print this information due to the extensive censorship that existed during stalinism. In a discussion of this transformation a few years later, one article did acknowledge that many members had been skeptical about the change. In the first few years after the transition, the author claimed, “a large portion of the membership had not believed in the possibility of functioning in residential chapters,” indicating that at the very least some women

Hungary, suggesting that this transformation was not initiated by party officials in Poland. Joanna Goven, personal correspondence with author, February 2001.

⁶¹ On the need as well as the difficulty to organize nonworking women and build up residential chapters prior to the decision, see, for example, Zofia Wasilkowska, “Podstawowe założenia statutu Ligi Kobiet,” Proceedings from the First All-Polish League of Women Congress, 63-69; “Sprawozdanie z realizacji wniosków KW PZPR przez Zarząd Warszawski L.K. za okres I półrocze 1951 r.,” 1951, File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-24, AAN; “Analiza pracy Ligi Kobiet,” 28 February 1951, File “KC PZPR Łódź,” sygn. 237/XV-17, AAN; “Uchwała,” 1951, File “KC PZPR,” sygn. 237/XV-29, AAN; Izolda Kowalska, “Najbliższe zadania,” *Kobieta*, no. 9 (January 1948): 3-4; “Instrukcja o pracy kół terenowych LK,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (May 1952): 11-17; “Co piszą o nas,” *Nasza Praca*, no. 1 (January 1953): 34-38; and M[aria] Winiarz, “Analiza pracy kół blokowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1953): 14-21.

⁶² Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, 6. Brown has shown the importance of the private sphere in the underground movement in the 1980s. The home, and the kitchen more specifically, became a space for opposition. Brown, *The Private Revolution*.

may have been dissatisfied with the transformation and may have feared a lowering of their status as workers.⁶³

In contrast to the silence in the stalinist period, in the mid-1950s, numerous members attempted to transform the group's organization. In pre-congress debates, women started to acknowledge difficulties that they faced in the workplace and explored the possibility of reinstating workplace chapters.⁶⁴ Some women openly questioned the decision to disband these chapters, which, they claimed, left working women without any support in the workplace. Trade unions were not doing enough to assist working women and ignored working women's specific problems. In a letter dated 30 October 1956 to central authorities of trade unions, the League's Central Administration demanded that working women's issues not be ignored during the ongoing discussions criticizing trade unions and reintroducing workers' councils.⁶⁵ Women working outside the home felt that the organization had abandoned them and they had no one to turn to when they were treated unfairly at work. As one woman noted, these types of sentiments were "a signal for the women's organization . . . that [it] could not under any circumstances leave working women's issues on the sideline."⁶⁶ In her conference speech, Musiałowa expressed dissatisfaction with the decision as well, referring to it as "a serious mistake." She criticized the League for making this change quickly without first determining through trial and error whether or not it was a good move, but she ignored the fact that the League probably had little say in making that transformation.⁶⁷

⁶³ "O 'zapomnianych' blokach i trudnościach niektórych kół blokowych," *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (April 1956): 26-27, quotation on 26. On the difficulties of organizing residential chapters following the directive specifically, see also Helena Dworakowska, "Zadania Ligi Kobiet w dalszej rozbudowie organizacji na nowym terenie działalności," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1955): 5-8.

⁶⁴ For some examples, see Prezydium Zarządu Głównego, "Do Zarządów Wojewódzkich, Powiatowych i Miejskich, do kół Ligi Kobiet, do kół Gospodyń ZSCh, do wszystkich członkiń Ligi Kobiet w mieście i na wsi," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1956): 3-4; Alicja Musiałowa, "Wstępna analiza pracy Ligi Kobiet w okresie 10-lecia jej istnienia: Skróty referatu przewodniczącej ZG LK – Alicji Musiałowej, wygłoszonego na Plenum w dniu 16.XI.55 r.," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1956): 5-8; "Mówią działaczki wojewódzkie Ligi Kobiet"; and "Blżej codziennego życia kobiet."

⁶⁵ ZGLK, "List Otwarty: Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych i Zarządy Główne Związków Zawodowych," *Nasza praca*, no. 11-12 (November-December 1956): 19-20.

⁶⁶ "Głosy terenu," 28.

⁶⁷ Musiałowa, "Referat przewodniczącej ZGLK Alicji Musiałowej," 16.

Residential chapters had not become as active as those that had previously functioned in workplaces. By 1956, numerous circles existed “only on paper,” and women attempted to locate the reasons for this inactivity.⁶⁸ Rather than bring women together, the decision to disband sometimes led to divisions among the women the organization was supposed to represent. Some nonworking women blamed working women for the League’s weakness, showing tension between women who were employed outside of the home and those who were not. In the city of Poznań, for example, Kierończyk, a housewife, argued that “working women . . . treat residential chapters with disregard, and their explanation that they do not have time is only an excuse. If they really wanted to, they would find the time. But they do not want to.” Furthermore, she directly called for a separation of working and nonworking women within the organization.⁶⁹ Komorkowa, president of a residential chapter, agreed with Kierończyk, and claimed that as more and more women entered the workforce, League activism had waned. “Leave us alone! We don’t have time,” working women claimed. “And they don’t want to help,” she noted. “They would not lose a lot of time in the League. They simply do not want to work socially—lack of time is only an excuse.”⁷⁰ Kierończyk and Komorkowa are two examples of housewives who resented working women’s lack of initiative and made them directly responsible for the general inactivity in residential chapters.

Some members of residential chapters disagreed with Kierończyk’s and Komorkowa’s criticism of working women and expressed the need for a mutual understanding among women. Rather than function in separate chapters, Popielowa, among others, called for working collectively. Instead of complaining about working women’s lack of initiative, housewives, she insisted, should assist women workers in alleviating their burdens by, for instance, picking up groceries for them during work hours or walking their young children to and from school. “Recently, there has been so much discussion and writing on the so-called ‘women’s hell’—let us mutually help each other to lessen this ‘hell.’” By not

⁶⁸ “O ‘zapomnianych’ blokach i trudnościach niektórych kół blokowych,” 26; “Niektóre problemy organizacyjne Z.W.L.K. w Bydgoszczy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (April 1956): 12-14; and “Koło blokowe—to podstawa pracy Ligi Kobiet w mieście,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1956): 10-11. As early as January 1955, Dworakowska pointed to this problem as well in Dworakowska, “Zadania Ligi Kobiet w dalszej rozbudowie organizacji.”

⁶⁹ “Mówią aktywistki poznańskich kół blokowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (July-August 1956): 37-38, quotation on 37.

⁷⁰ “O ‘zapomnianych’ blokach i trudnościach niektórych kół blokowych,” 26.

working collectively, she noted, “we would not be friends from the League, but some kind of malicious ‘witches.’”⁷¹

Żelazkowa, a housewife from Poznań, thought that it was “completely natural” for working women to be less active than housewives and found no need to alter the situation. “Let’s be honest: we have more time. Just think about the fact that a working woman, if she keeps house and has children—works arduously for many hours a day. . . . She has to accomplish everything that we do, but during much less convenient hours in addition to her eight hours of work, plus an average two hours of commuting time, and plus social work in her place of employment. . . . These women do laundry in the middle of the night, cook in the evenings, and take care of groceries when stores are most congested.”⁷² Żelazkowa and Popielowa did not call for a reinstatement of workplace chapters, but for acceptance by housewives of working women’s difficult situation. They expressed the need for women to aid each other in their daily activities rather than rely on state assistance or on changes in the system. In a political system that claimed to provide communal social services for women to allow them to enter the workforce in greater numbers, this realization by League members is especially salient. Women individually were to take over tasks that were supposed to have been met by the socialist state. Since the state was not providing working women with these needed social services, the League was to engage in these activities, and hence was to act as a self-help organization.

Not only would working women benefit from housewives’ assistance, but, according to Popielowa, nonworking women would gain something from their contact with working women as well. “Undoubtedly, the average working woman knows more, is more enlightened, [and] is more broad-minded than the average housewife. The eternal pots and lines have after all confined and stupefied us a bit.”⁷³ Although Popielowa was a housewife herself, she clearly bought into the idea that nonworking women were more “backward” and in need of enlightenment, again perpetuating the ideas that *przodownice społeczne* advocated a few years earlier. Even though many women who worked did not

⁷¹ “Mówią aktywistki poznańskich kół blokowych,” 37. Her vague statement regarding “women’s hell” may be a reference to reproductive rights. In 1930, Tadeusz Żeleński Boy published a well-known book against the criminalization of abortion entitled *Women’s Hell*. Tadeusz Żeleński Boy, *Piekło kobiet* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Boy’a, 1930). In 1956, Poland passed legislation making abortion more accessible to women.

⁷² “Mówią aktywistki poznańskich kół blokowych,” 37.

⁷³ *Ibid.* Standing in long lines for groceries and other necessities was common throughout the region.

participate actively in the organization, their worldly knowledge would be advantageous to housewives. Working women likewise cooked meals for their families and stood in eternal lines, but by having another outlet, the workplace, they, simply by the fact of working outside the home, in her view, were more educated and enlightened.

Some women also criticized housewives for not being active in residential chapters. Izabela Pałczyńska, president of a League's city administration, for example, argued that many women, in addition to raising children and working outside of the home, willingly took on League responsibilities, while "those who do not have children, are not employed, [and] do not work socially" are not active in the organization.⁷⁴ "Working women's passivity," Popielowa contended, was not the sole reason for weak chapters. Once all housewives become active, she continued, "we will stop having 'perpetual grievances' toward working women."⁷⁵ She and Pałczyńska indicated that it was insufficient to blame only working women for lack of initiative. Housewives with fewer responsibilities were also not doing enough.

In part, women's activity resulted from their sense of what the League could and did offer. Some women felt that the League had little or nothing to provide them, and, as a result, did not join, did not participate actively, or left residential chapters. In response to a question of whether or not she had contact with the organization, Janina S., an employed woman, for example, explained:

I have a membership card, but beyond this there is nothing that connects me to the League of Women. These residential chapters are an organization for 'household hens.' I am not exaggerating; these chapters truly play on women's 'hen' instincts. 'Wash the stairs, sow grass seeds in the yard in front of the apartment building, plant flowers in the window. . . . Someone concocted the senseless myth that the ideal activism for residential chapters is repairing holes in stairs and washing windows in stairwells. (Of course I am saying this as a figure of speech.) And that is why we should not be surprised that working women flee from residential chapters, and housewives do not grow even a bit wiser in them."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "Plenum Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1956): 20-23, quotation on 21. See also "Nie zapominajmy o robotniczych osiedlach," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January 1955): 19 for an earlier assessment of the situation. In this article, the author argued that working women and housewives lived very different lives and claimed that no one took an interest in organizing nonworking women and therefore the creation of residential chapters was unsuccessful.

⁷⁵ "Mówią aktywistki poznańskich kół blokowych," 37. See also "Pokierujmy umiejętnie pracą aktywu," *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (February 1956): 6-7.

⁷⁶ "Na tropie spraw zaniedbanych," 12.

Like Popielowa, Janina depicted housewives as “backward” and less enlightened than working women. These “household hens,” in her opinion, deserved more from the organization than just the opportunity to make their apartment buildings aesthetically pleasing. Janina’s statement is not far-fetched. Residential chapters did often center on such activities. One article entitled “Let’s take care of our apartment buildings, as we take care of our own homes” contended that the League should be responsible for the “cleanliness and aesthetics of apartment buildings.”⁷⁷ The League also often held contests of cleanliness.⁷⁸ Women extended their domestic responsibilities into the community and apartment buildings through League activities. But some women, like Janina, expected more. As an employed woman, she felt that she had little to gain from a group that focused on such trivial issues. In her assessment, housewives were “backward” not because of the “eternal pots and lines” that Popielowa mentioned but because of the activities that the League promoted in places of residence.

Housewives likewise called for more from their organization. Czesława N., for instance, claimed that a woman who did not work “does not want to regress. . . . Every day [she] wants to tear away from her pots as soon as they are washed. But meanwhile the League of Women tries to push us, housewives, back among the pots, even during meetings.” This housewife did not want lectures on how to make “a dish from codfish” or how to prepare “salads,” but “I want something else.”⁷⁹ Through its Home Economics Committee, the League did often run such courses particularly on cooking, cleaning, raising children, health, and hygiene; some women found them to be beneficial in contrast to this housewife’s assessment. Elżbieta Z. believed that the League was “indispensable for housewives, but we have to give it [the organization] sensible content.” Rather than focus on trivial matters, the League should center its attention on “educational, political, cultural, philosophical, [and] traditional/moral issues,” she claimed.⁸⁰ By changing its direction, these women implied that not only would the League

⁷⁷ “Dbajmy o nasz blok, jak o własny dom,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (March 1956): 23-24, quotation on 23.

⁷⁸ In the Białystok region, for example, in the 1960s, chapters held contests to clean staircases. Izabela Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet (na przykładzie badań na Białostoczyźnie)* (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW w Białymstoku, 1984), 142.

⁷⁹ “Na tropie spraw zaniedbanych,” 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

become more beneficial for women, but its members would also participate more actively, thereby strengthening the organization.

Discussions often marked by tension among nonworking and working women indicate that members exhibited concern about the validity and functioning of their organization. Most of the women mentioned above worried about the League's weakness in places of residence and sought to strengthen the group. In so doing, they conveyed the important meaning of activism in their own lives. They did not wait for directives from the center but presented their own ideas and criticisms with the hope that women would become active participants. Furthermore, women made conscious decisions about whether or not to join, and members decided whether or not to be active participants. Each member engaged in the organization in the manner she saw fit for her lifestyle and took from the organization what she deemed most significant for herself as an individual. Some working mothers actively participated even though their activism added another burden to their double burden of work and family/domestic responsibilities, while some nonworking women without children deliberately decided not to join even though they may have had more time to engage in social activism.

Rebirth and Dissolution of Workplace Chapters: Party Decision, League Dissatisfaction, 1956 to 1966

These discussions, along with concerns over the lack of employment opportunities for women, inadequate occupational training, and specific shop floor issues, which members expressed before and during the 1957 conference, resulted in the rebirth of chapters in places of employment in 1957.⁸¹ Central Administration members and conference delegates heard the voices of working women and women who found little value in residential chapters. In the years following the meeting, women voiced their discontent with the workplace even more vigorously.⁸² Ironically, complaints in 1956 and

⁸¹ ZGLK, *II Zjazd Ligi Kobiet*.

⁸² The third national conference, held in 1962, for example, centered on problems that working women faced, particularly on combining domestic and child raising responsibilities with employment. ZGLK, *III Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1962). The issues delegates and leaders raised resembled many of those that women expressed in 1956, demonstrating that women's situation had not changed sufficiently. Following the conference, a discussion criticizing the content of the gathering entered the pages of *Nasza praca* as well as other publications. Some journalists and members claimed that the organization spent too much time on work-related issues and not enough on raising an enlightened citizen. Even during a session that was supposed to examine women's participation in

1957 resulted in the reinstatement of workplace chapters, and similar complaints since that rebirth led to the liquidation of those chapters in 1966. That year, once again party officials decided to abolish workplace chapters and build up existing or create new residential circles, a decision toward which numerous members expressed dissatisfaction. The events preceding this decision and the discussions following it display the most explicit resistance to, or at the very least dissatisfaction with, party policy that members exhibited. Resulting in a loss of thousands of employed members, this directive significantly weakened the organization's influence and activities. The group's "troublesome" behavior in the workplace and continuing criticism of women's employment situation played a significant role in the party's decision.

Stanisława Legec, an outspoken Central Administration secretary, discussed some of working women's hardships, particularly unemployment and lack of skills.⁸³ From a survey of women registered as searching for work in Warsaw, she concluded that the situation of women's work was rather dismal. To remedy the situation, she stressed the need to focus on training young girls so that when they looked for a job they would not answer "nothing" to the questions "and what do you want to do; what do you know?" Legec also called for mobilizing women by placing them in jobs that men were doing, but that women could also perform successfully;⁸⁴ by offering more part-time opportunities; and by improving such social services as daycare, especially for children of single

public life, the delegates turned the discussion into one centering on need for greater advancement for women in employment and politics. See, for example, Melania Mroczek, "Skomentujmy jedno z ważnych zadań uchwały zjazdowej," *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (1962): 1-9.

⁸³ In the 1960s, Polish sociologists also raised issues that were similar to the problems that members began to discuss. For some examples, see Stefania Dziecielska-Machnikowska and Jolanta Kulpińska, *Awans kobiety* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1966); Sokołowska, ed., *Kobieta współczesna*; and *Sytuacja kobiety pracującej w Polsce ludowej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związkowe CRZZ, 1963). In 1961, the organization worked closely with a well-known sociologist, Jerzy Piotrowski, on a survey that dealt with the effects of motherhood on women's careers, women's participation in career training, and time women spent on housekeeping. Maria Aszkenazy, "Rozważania o perspektywach," *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (May 1961): 12-17. Piotrowski subsequently published on women's issues and family, including Jerzy Piotrowski, *Praca zawodowa kobiety a rodzina: Z prac Instytutu Gospodarstwa Społecznego* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1963), and Jerzy Piotrowski, ed., *Wybrane problemy socjalistycznej rodziny: Praca zbiorowa* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1978).

⁸⁴ This is similar to the regendering that Wendy Goldman has discussed in Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

mothers.⁸⁵ In a state that was supposed to have been able to employ all its willing and able citizens, this criticism was significant.

Members disapproved of unfair treatment; lower status and lower pay than men; unfair firing; inadequate employment and managerial opportunities; unsatisfactory workplace conditions; and poor relations with trade unions, workers' councils, and women's commissions, with which the League worked closely in places of employment. In a metallurgy factory in Warsaw, for example, members claimed that directors did not respect women and did not want to hire them, and in a rubber factory, older women complained that they were mistreated by male managers and directors. Lower pay for equal work was a problem that according to one member led to "stormy" discussions during League meetings.⁸⁶ Women, according to Legec, had accepted the notion that they were "for 'dirty work,' men for management." Women did "not see help or support from anywhere, they [did] not see a way out of this situation."⁸⁷ Her statement demonstrates women's frustration with as well as acceptance of their lower status in the workplace. Ironically, although women were prohibited from working in numerous fields and positions due to their reproductive potential, they were pushed into "dirty work" that was often much more physically strenuous than managerial positions.

Members also disclosed dissatisfaction with shop floor conditions. In one textile factory in Rzeszów, for example, members complained about poor ventilation, unappealing work clothing that was too big, unsatisfactory train schedules, inadequate access to health care in the factory (the factory used to have health care available for its workers, but that was no longer the case), and unavailable daycare and preschool facilities at the worksite.⁸⁸ In other factories, they maintained that machines were not fixed in a timely manner, protective clothing was short-lasting, work shifts were poorly organized, and the shop floor as well as bathrooms were dirty and unhygienic. Furthermore, members

⁸⁵ Stanisława Legec, ". . . Co Pani potrafi zrobić? . . . Nic," *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (1960): 18-23, quotation on 22-23.

⁸⁶ W. J., "Nad czym pracuję komisja kobieca CRZZ," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (January-February 1961): 38-41, quotation on 39.

⁸⁷ Stanisława Legec, "Jeszcze o współdziałaniu komisji kobiecej z kołem LK," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1960): 10-14, quotation on 12.

⁸⁸ Lidia Brzuchacz, "Robocze Prezydium," *Nasza praca*, no. 7 (October 1961): 27-33.

were upset with the hostile response they received to their criticisms from some directors.⁸⁹ Since the directors were unwilling to address their hardships, women workers had to find other avenues, such as the League, through which to disclose their dissatisfaction. Although these members did not directly condemn party practices, indirectly they acknowledged that the state was not providing adequate training, work opportunities, or services for women, and was not guaranteeing equality and proper treatment in the workforce.

Tensions arose between the League and women's commissions, workers' councils, and trade unions, all of which were supposed to represent women on the shop floor to varying degrees.⁹⁰ League leaders in workplaces often were also members of the commissions and councils. Women's commissions were established as part of the trade unions in 1957 in workplaces that employed more than twenty women. The tasks outlined for the League and women's commissions often were vague. The League was to conduct social activism in an effort to assist both working and nonworking women and their families, while the commissions, which functioned directly under trade unions, were to protect working women's rights and promote the development of women's work skills.⁹¹ Given the rather unclear and easily misinterpreted responsibilities, work within these two groups undoubtedly overlapped to some degree.

Six years prior to the 1966 transition that abolished workplace chapters, discussion about the League's unnecessary presence in workplaces was already brewing. Commissions and unions on some shop floors belittled the League and claimed that commissions and unions were sufficient for solving women's work-related problems. League members, not surprisingly, were unsettled by this claim, and insisted that League participation was crucial. Legec, for instance, maintained that a dichotomy

⁸⁹ "Solidarna i zorganizowana działalność kobiet – to podstawa korzystania z pełni przysługujących im praw," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1960): 26-34, esp. 31.

⁹⁰ On an excellent study of tension between trade unions and the *Zhenotdel*, see Elizabeth Wood, "Class and Gender at Loggerheads in the Early Soviet State: Who Should Organize the Female Proletariat and How?" in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 294-310, esp. 295-96. In this work, she points to the complex relationship between the two groups, both of which were to represent women and both of which were also tied to the state. On early signs of tensions in Poland between trade unions and the League, see Alicja Musiałowa, "Przemówienie końcowe na plenum ZGLK w dn. 4.3.1958 r.," *Nasza praca*, no. 5-58 (31 March 1958): 20-26, esp. 25.

⁹¹ Krystyna Wrochno, *Woman in Poland* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1968), 87, 91-93; and "Uchwała," *Nasza praca*, no. 12 –64 (15 July 1958): 38-40.

between “Us and Them” (the League and women’s commissions) was not a beneficial way to proceed. Commissions, she claimed, should want to create a vital women’s organization, one which would support the commission and ease its work.⁹² Others also were disappointed with the lack of female solidarity between League members and commissions, resulting in a “battle” for control.⁹³ As early as 1961, one member found that the discussion of where the League should function was somewhat humorous. “Wash your hands or your feet,” she stated, that is, “create League chapters in places of employment and institutions or among housewives.” In her assessment, having to choose between chapters at work and at home was like choosing between whether to wash your hands or your feet. Both were equally important.⁹⁴ Most members likewise saw the importance of women’s activism in both places.

Members also complained about their relationship with workers’ councils. In a Warsaw metal factory, they criticized the council’s treatment of women. The council had an “odd relation to women.” It did not involve women or enough women in committees, did not give them responsibilities in those committees, and did not even inform them about meetings. During their own meetings League members discussed the need to change the situation. They placed the blame directly on the factory’s party secretary for not taking initiative in remedying the problem. Gifts and well wishes on special occasions, particularly International Women’s Day, from directors and the secretary were insufficient, they claimed.⁹⁵

In their criticisms of their relationship to other workplace organizations, members attempted to define who was to represent women workers. Trade unions, workers’ councils, and women’s commissions were not, in their opinion, accomplishing enough for women workers and had not accomplished enough prior to the reinstatement of workplace chapters. League activists believed that

⁹² Legec “Jeszcze o współdziałaniu komisji kobiecej,” 13.

⁹³ Weronika Jackowska, “Głos w dyskusji – pierwszy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1960): 15-21, quotation on 16.

⁹⁴ S. Olczak, “Koła terenowe radzą,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1961): 57-59, quotation on 57.

⁹⁵ “Solidarna i zorganizowana działalność kobiet,” 28. International Women’s Day, 8 March, was an important holiday for women throughout Eastern Europe. Women dressed up for work, attended special events and performances, and received gifts and flowers from male relatives and employers.

abolishing these circles would yet again lead to a neglect of working women's needs and problems.⁹⁶ This situation illustrates the tension not only between a women's organization and the generally male-led workplace unions and councils, but also between two women's groups that were vying for representation of women on the shopfloor. At the same time, stressing the need for female solidarity between women's commissions and the League points to a strong gender consciousness. Women from both groups, some League members argued, should work collectively to alleviate working women's burdens rather than in opposition to each other.

In 1966, at the fourth national conference, the organization announced its structural transformation, disbanding all chapters in workplaces and focusing on creating new and building up old chapters in places of residence. The reasons the League officially provided for this new regulation were at odds with the reasons numerous members conveyed. League activists did not respond uniformly to the directive, although the organization's publications, not surprisingly, typically portrayed the decision positively. In Nowa Huta, the dissolution was supposedly marked with celebration with party and trade union officials thanking members for their activism.⁹⁷ In the Białystok region, almost immediately all workplace chapters were dissolved and 180 residential ones were formed.⁹⁸

At the time of the ruling, the organization's leaders maintained that the decision to disband was made over a period of months.⁹⁹ Indeed, members had discussed the importance of building up chapters in places of residence for a number of years prior to the decree, arguing that growth in this area would strengthen the organization and would benefit housewives, who had not been participating

⁹⁶ Working women's issues were neglected in the Soviet Union when the *Zhenotdel* was disbanded. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*.

⁹⁷ Tadeusz Nowicki, "Informacja dotycząca realizacji instrukcji sekretariatu KC PZPR o pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem działalności Ligi Kobiet w miejscu zamieszkania," 31 March 1967, File "KW PZPR—Wydział Organizacyjny: Sektor Rad Narodowych i Organizacji Mas., 1959-1970," sygn. PZPR KW Kr 592, Archiwum Państwowy w Krakowie, Kraków (hereafter APK).

⁹⁸ Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 141.

⁹⁹ "Wstęp," in *Nowy etap działalności Ligi Kobiet: Materiały z obrad IV Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet 26-28 czerwca 1966 r.* (Warsaw: ZGLK, 1966), 4-5, esp. 4; and Stanisława Zawadecka, "Rola i zadania Ligi Kobiet na tle rozwoju ruchu kobiecego: Jego nowych potrzeb i możliwości," in *ibid.*, 14-32.

to their fullest.¹⁰⁰ In fact, attempting to strengthen these chapters had been on the League's agenda since the group's formation.¹⁰¹ Members had not, however, called for disbanding workplace chapters. It is hard to believe that such a mass organization would deliberately call for a restructuring that would considerably weaken its influence among women and would significantly decrease membership. Furthermore, only nine years earlier the League reinstated workplace chapters because members felt that women workers had not been represented fairly and that residential circles were inactive and inadequate. Other factors must have played a role in the decision.

With support from some party members of the organization, including Stanisława Zawadecka—Parliament member and League president from June 1965 when Musiałowa resigned due to added party responsibilities—the party's Central Committee decided on this resolution at its national meeting.¹⁰² The decision was a decree from above, one over which rank-and-file members had no control. As a former textile worker in Łódź, Urszula P., stated, “not someone else, but precisely these authorities drove us out of the workplace.”¹⁰³ Even she, a lifelong party member and at one point a

¹⁰⁰ See, for example Janina Iwanicka, “Przysłowie chcieć – to móc jest zawsze aktualne – czyli pomyślmy o kołach terenowych i problemowych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1961): 60-65; S. Stankiewicz, “Aby ich życie nie ograniczyło się tylko do kuchni . . .,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1961): 46-50; Weronika Jackowska, “Pracy w środowisku gospodyń domowych nie wolno odkładać w nieskończoność,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1961): 9-18; Weronika Jackowska, “Praca w środowisku gospodyń domowych winna wypływać, z potrzeb tego środowiska,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1962): 1-5; “Realizm działania,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1963): 35-37; Stanisława Zawadecka, “Nie zamiast, ale obok . . .,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1964): 1-6; Henryka Mikuć, “O pracy ogniw Ligi Kobiet w miejscu zamieszkania,” *Nasz praca*, no. 4 (1965): 12-22; Maria Winiarz, “Wnioski III Zjazdu LK w sprawach pracy zawodowej kobiet – a praktyczna ich realizacja,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1963): 1-6; and Weronika Jackowska, “Nasze miejsce społeczno działania,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5-6 (1966): 3-7.

¹⁰¹ Edwarda Orłowska, “O kołach terenowych słów kilku,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (April 1947): 19-21, esp. 19; “Ramowy plan pracy Ligi Kobiet na rok 1951,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (January 1951): 4-16, esp. 11; and M. Wawrzykowska, “Ocena pracy Ligi Kobiet za 1-szy kwartał 1951 r.,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (May 1951): 14-21, esp. 18.

¹⁰² On the decree, see KC PZPR, *O pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet: Instrukcja Sekretariatu KC PZPR* (Warsaw: July 1966); Tadeusz Lenart, “O niektórych doświadczeniach pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet w województwie gdańskim,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1968): 11-19; “Realizacja uchwały IV Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet i kierunki dalszej działalności: Referat Prezydium ŻGLK wygłoszony na II Plenum w dniu 3 lutego 1967 r.,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2 (1967): 3-25; Maria Regent-Lechowicz, “Sprawozdanie z prac komisji statutowej,” in *Nowy etap działalności*, 139-44; and ZWLK, *Sprawozdanie z działalności za okres 1966-1970 r. na VII łódzki zjazd sprawozdawczo-wyborczy* (Łódź: ZWLK, 1970 June), 1, 5, in File “Liga Kobiet, 1968,” sygn. I 3b, DZS, BN. Walczewska and Ratman-Liwerska also have stated that this was a decision that the party made. See Sławomira Walczewska, “Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL,” *Pehnym glosem*, no. 1 (summer 1993): 25-29, esp. 28; and Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczy aktywizacji kobiet*, 88-89. Zawadecka served as president until 1968 when she resigned.

¹⁰³ Urszula P., interview by author, Łódź, 27 March 2000.

member of its Central Committee, blamed party officials for this directive. Bożena N. declared rather sarcastically: “We were not told that they were dissolving our organization, but we were told that we could move to residential areas, [and] that our members from workplace chapters could also function in residential chapters.”¹⁰⁴ Although she did not outright disclose the perpetrators of this decision, she implied that the party had been the main instigator.

The events surrounding the 1966 directive demonstrate the party’s focus on gender over class solidarity. The dissolution of workplace chapters was to bring together all women—workers, housewives, intellectuals—in League activities. In addition to the disbanding of these chapters, the party also introduced a new women’s representative within the political system: *Krajowa Rada Kobiet Polskich* (Polish Women’s National Council), whose president was Zawadecka, further indicating an emphasis on gender over class.¹⁰⁵ This Council was to oversee the work of all women’s groups, further develop women’s employment and social activism, represent women in the political structure, and represent Polish women in the Women’s International Democratic Federation, work that the League was charged with prior to the dissolution. Instead of a semi-independent mass women’s organization conducting this work, with these changes a body within the party-state system was to take on these initiatives on both the national and provincial levels.¹⁰⁶ This transition also resulted in less concern within the League over work-related issues, such as unemployment and skills, and a greater focus on household responsibilities, child raising, and political education.¹⁰⁷

The official reasons given for the 1966 decree were vague. League leaders combined arguments based on vague communist rhetoric, nationalism, and traditionalism. The introduction to the conference proceedings stated that the transition resulted from the “general development of the

¹⁰⁴ Bożena N., interview by author, Warsaw, 17 March 2000.

¹⁰⁵ “Stanisława Zawadecka o Krajowej Radzie Kobiet,” *Zwierciadło*, no. 20 (15 May 1966): 2; and “Dalsze kierunki i formy działania Ligi Kobiet na obecnym etapie rozwoju ruchu kobiecego w kraju: Referat Prezydium Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1966): 3-29, esp. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Roman Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn w Polsce Ludowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1975), 208; and Wrochno, *Woman in Poland*, 88-89.

¹⁰⁷ At the 1970, 1975, and 1979 national conferences, although women discussed workplace issues, they emphasized domesticity and promoted party propaganda. Proceedings from the Fifth National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 10-11 (1971); Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 4-5 (1975); and Proceedings from the Seventh National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1979).

country, dynamics of social life, and also transformations made within the women's movement."¹⁰⁸ Zawadecka expounded on these reasons. She claimed that changes needed to reflect women's fuller roles in the country's economic, social, and cultural developments. The conference, therefore, presented new needs and "new tasks, adapted to the new conditions." She continued: "the point is for the League of Women's activities to serve women and their families as well as possible, [and] to strengthen the power of our Fatherland—People's Poland." Residential chapters, according to her, were essential in further development of the organization.¹⁰⁹ It is unclear from her statement how exactly women's position changed, what these new needs were, and how this new structure would be beneficial. Maria Regent-Lechowicz, president of the League Statute Committee, claimed that the change came about because working women were finding it hard to solve everyday family issues, particularly in raising children.¹¹⁰ She was correct in stating that working women, especially mothers, experienced difficulty in combining household and family responsibilities with employment, a topic that women had discussed since 1956, but she did not explain how residential chapters would solve these issues better than workplace circles. In fact, one can argue that workplace chapters would have been able to do this more successfully, since most women within those chapters had similar difficulties in combining their multiple roles, while housewives struggled with their own hardships.

The unofficial, and in my opinion more likely, reason for the directive was the League's growing workplace complaints and dissatisfaction combined with party leaders' desire to control this form of insubordination.¹¹¹ During an interview, speaking in general about women's discontent, Irena

¹⁰⁸ "Wstęp," 4. See also Regent-Lechowicz, "Sprawozdanie z prac komisji statutowej."

¹⁰⁹ Stanisława Zawadecka, "Otwarcie Zjazdu," in *Nowy etap działalności*, 6, and Zawadecka, "Rola i zadania Ligi Kobiet," esp. 14.

¹¹⁰ Regent-Lechowicz, "Sprawozdanie z prac komisji statutowej," 140.

¹¹¹ Ratman-Liwerska has claimed that the reason for this directive was due to the overlapping of responsibilities between the League and such other groups as trade unions. Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczy aktywizacji kobiet*, 87-88. Although I believe that doubling up of tasks undoubtedly played a role in the decision, my research has shown that working women's insubordination was the central reason for this directive. Walczewska has suggested that it is possible that the decision was made to punish the League for its insubordination. In 1958, when six thousand women lost their jobs, the League tried to organize work cooperatives through which women could gain employment. She sees this as the only possible act of insubordination that the League exhibited. Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet," 28. It seems unlikely that party officials would wait eight years to punish that act. Instead, I think acts of insubordination were not limited to this one incidence. All of these reasons probably did play some role in the decision. Roman Wieruszewski and

H. claimed that “authorities always liked the women’s organization until it desired too much.” When members “became strong and . . . advocated their own arguments, . . . authorities either withdrew to the shadows or even ignored the women’s organization, . . . leaving women with an unsettled problem.”¹¹² In this case, authorities did not “withdraw to the shadows” or “ignore” the organization, but rather showed their dissatisfaction by wielding their power in transforming the group. At the same time, they ignored the workplace problems that women brought up in the years preceding the directive.

Central to the 1966 decision, recalls Bożena N., was the League’s resistance to the newly implemented night shift for women and demands for workplace equality and respect.¹¹³ Not surprisingly, working mothers in particular opposed having to work at night. Members also fought for bonuses for strenuous work, additional protective legislation for pregnant women, and equal status and pay with men. Even in feminized “light” industry, such as textiles, men typically held managerial positions, while women were relegated to lower levels, a situation that members in the workplace attempted to remedy. The party, Bożena claimed, became “uncomfortable” with these demands, particularly because “equality was recorded on the banners of this leadership.” She noted, “it was stated that equality existed. . . . This was absolutely, well, not true, [and] that is what our organization demanded in workplaces.”¹¹⁴ Women, in her opinion, recognized the discrepancy between constitutional rights and reality and demanded a bridging of this gap. The party had not emphasized in practice the equality that party leaders so often advocated in theory.

Ratman-Liwierska have indicated that this transformation was due to a clash between the League’s stated goals and activism. Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn w Polsce*, 207; and Ratman-Liwierska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 94. I have found that there was more at play here.

¹¹² Irena H., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

¹¹³ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

¹¹⁴ Bożena N., interview, Warsaw, 1 June 2000. Irena H. also discussed the abolition of the third shift for women as an important demand that the League did not win. Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000. Both the League president and numerous delegates at the seventh national conference provided similar reasons for the disbanding of workplace chapters and placed the blame directly on party officials. Eugenia Kempara, “Referat programowy: Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1982): 6-21, esp. 8-10; and “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1982): 22-44. Kempara also mentioned these reasons in Eugenia Kempara, interview by Felicja Borzyszkowa-Sękowska, “Na czele ruchu kobiecego,” in *Być kobietą . . .* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia, 1982), 130-50, esp. 136-37.

Urszula P. likewise believed that the League became “uncomfortable” for the party. Women, she maintained, “possess greater courage to call attention to certain things. . . . They are capable of openly stating whatever does not appeal to them, and there was a time when we became uncomfortable.” Authorities claimed that “*baby* were meddling in everything,” and as a result the party decided to “get rid of them,” that is, their organization, in places of employment.¹¹⁵ Barbara K. from Nowa Huta stated that the League “was driven out of workplaces. . . . Of course, this was a political issue. Something was uncomfortable for someone.”¹¹⁶ Rather than make the changes for which League activists were calling, party leaders removed the troublesome organization from workplaces and thereby ignored, as Irena H. stated, the problems women workers faced.

By disclosing discontent, then, League members played a role in the party’s decision. It was their actions and words of dissatisfaction toward women’s workplace conditions that resulted in the 1966 resolution. Prior to the change, members did not wait on the sidelines for workplace improvements and instead openly discussed work-related problems and conveyed their demands to party and workplace authorities. Although the 1966 decision was not what members had intended and actually led to a suppression of their desires, members’ actions and frustration led to the decree.

Reactions to the 1966 Directive: Resentment and Resistance

The League officially accepted this transformation and members discussed it positively at the national meeting. However, one can find tension even within conference proceedings and the internal bulletin, demonstrating that not all members were willing to accept the transition without expressing their dissatisfaction and questioning the directive. Some women refused to join residential chapters, some expressed concerns over establishing new chapters and ensuring that women workers’ issues would be addressed adequately, and some continued their activism in illegal worksite chapters.

In some places, women workers were unwilling to join new residential chapters; as one Central Administration member put it, they “do not yet trust this form of activism.”¹¹⁷ In a 1967 report,

¹¹⁵ Urszula P., interview.

¹¹⁶ Barbara K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000.

¹¹⁷ Jackowska, “Organizacja nowych kół,” 12. See also Maria Aszkenazy, “Nasza współpraca ze związkami zawodowymi,” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1967): 10-14.

a party official maintained that League meetings in residential chapters were small due to working women's refusal to attend. Membership, he stated, fell from 4,767 to 198 in his district.¹¹⁸ Women workers may have decided not to join residential chapters for a number of reasons, and their unwillingness to participate points to resistance to the transformation. As members of chapters on the shop floor, they were able to meet during work hours, or immediately following work, thereby not cutting into their personal time. In residential circles, they would have had to make special efforts to participate in activities and meetings. As some women stated during the 1956 pre-congress debates, working women had little time for the organization. They also previously may have joined in workplaces because of pressure from League or party members. Employers and members knew exactly who was a member and who was not, while in places of residence, women's role in the organization was less exposed.

Finally, some women workers developed a new working-class consciousness after the many years of working in a socialist state. They felt that the issues that were most important to them as workers significantly differed from those that were essential to nonworking women, and they resisted being pushed back into an identification with the home. In other words, they felt that they had little in common with housewives and, therefore, did not want to join residential chapters.¹¹⁹ As Barbara Einhorn has argued, "there are many voices which suggest that women's self-esteem and even their sense of self was integrally bound up with their working lives."¹²⁰ For League members, this sense of self also included their participation in the workplace women's organization, which created another dimension of workplace solidarity among women. Women workers also exhibited a strong gender

¹¹⁸ Józef Zając, "Informacja: O realizacji instrukcji Sekretariatu KC PZPR o pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet," 10 March 1967, File "KW PZPR—Wydział Organizacyjny: Sektor Rad Narodowych i Organizacji Mas., 1959-1970," sygn. PZPR KW Kr 592, APK.

¹¹⁹ Urszula P., interview; and Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000. In her study of marital status in Germany, historian Elizabeth Heineman found that it was significantly more acceptable for women to combine family and employment outside of the home in East Germany than in West Germany. East German policymakers identified women with employment more than West German legislators, who connected women more directly to domesticity. Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), esp. epilogue, and Elizabeth Heineman, "Gender, Public Policy, and Memory: Waiting Wives and War Widows in the Postwar Germans," in *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, ed. Peter Fritzsche and Alan Confino (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 214-38. In Poland, by 1966 working women themselves identified with their work role, and not just domesticity.

¹²⁰ Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, 140.

consciousness. They wanted a women's group to represent women's issues on the shopfloor rather than depend on gender-neutral groups, such as trade unions and workers' councils, which were more concerned about working men. Women's commissions, which were closely linked to these other groups, were not doing enough to alleviate their burdens. Both gender and class, then, influenced members' perception of working women's need for workplace representation.

Members and even some party officials frequently portrayed this transformation as a difficult task. Finding new meeting spaces (in workplaces, they met at the work site), financing activities, and especially recruiting new members and encouraging old ones to join residential chapters were all seen as hardships.¹²¹ Aszkenazy questioned the future relationships between the League and women's commissions as well as trade unions, relationships that the League was supposed to maintain. According to her, numerous members were nervous that women's work-related problems would be lost within this new structure. As in the debates one decade earlier, women were concerned that they would not be represented adequately and desired a League presence on the shopfloor. Aszkenazy indicated that the situation was not yet settled, showing that even she, a national leader of the organization, was not convinced of the benefits of this new relationship. She stated: "I do not intend to evaluate this cooperation. After all, I believe that the short time period does not yet allow a clear-sighted analysis."¹²² Unlike other prominent members, Aszkenazy did not portray a positive picture of the transition; she questioned its future.

¹²¹ For some examples of these difficulties, see Jackowska, "Organizacja nowych kół," esp. 13-14, Weronika Jackowska, "I w środowiskach wielkomiejskich mamy wiele do działania," *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1967): 4-13; Anna Sznicer, "Kobiety powinny posiadać zawodowe kwalifikacje," in *Nowy etap działalności*, 57-60, esp. 57; Jadwiga Borawska, "Z każdym dniem wzrasta nasza aktywność," in *ibid.*, 63-64; Kazimiera Magdalska, "Trzeba wypracować nowe formy pracy w miejscu zamieszkania," in *ibid.*, 105-8; and "Realizacja uchwały IV Krajowego Zjazdu." On party officials' concern, see, for example, Edward Cech, "Informacja o pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet dzielnicy Kraków Podgórze," 1967, Józef Tobiasz, "Informacja: Dotycząca realizacji instrukcji Sekretariatu KC o pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet pow. Nowy Sącz," 1967, K. Bienkowski, "Informacja: O realizacji instrukcji Sekretariatu KC PZPR o pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem działalności Ligi Kobiet w miejscu zamieszkania w powiecie żywieckim," 1967, all in File "KW PZPR—Wydział Organizacyjny: Sektor Rad Narodowych i Organizacji Mas., 1959-1970," sygn. PZPR KW Kr 592, APK.

¹²² Aszkenazy, "Nasza współpraca ze związkami zawodowymi," 11.

Discussions regarding the transformation, which the Central Administration Presidium referred to as a “crisis,” were “often very lively and sometimes had controversial tones.”¹²³ Some members found the reorganization to be “not very attractive.” Following the resolution, “discussions flared up among active members.” They contended that limitations were being placed on their activism and that their work in residential places was much less essential.¹²⁴ Other members did not want to give up the experiences, gains, and influence they had achieved over the years in workplaces. They believed that the League should continue to have a voice in places of employment, even if the organization no longer had workplace chapters.¹²⁵ In some areas, members worried that the entire organization would be disbanded and that they “had nothing to say,” leading to “confusion.”¹²⁶ At the conference, Janina Suska-Janakowska, president of the Łódź provincial administration, asked for specific directions on how this reorganization, “a by no means trivial problem,” would take place. Without these guidelines, she feared that the transformation would lead to “organizational chaos.” In Łódź, a city with a high percentage of working women especially in the textile industry and a tradition of labor activism, this problem, not surprisingly, “aroused many doubts, caused much resentment, and raise[d] many questions,” questions that Suska-Janakowska wanted to be prepared to answer upon her arrival back to the city.¹²⁷ According to the secretary of a party district committee, some working women showed signs of “bitterness.”¹²⁸ His statement indicates that local party officials were aware of League members’ resentment toward the resolution. A party city committee secretary claimed that both trade unions and the League’s city administration “did not approach the reorganization of League chapters

¹²³ “Realizacja uchwały IV Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet,” 4. See also Krystyna Zalewska, “Informacja o pracach Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet w okresie od 1 stycznia do 31 maja 1967 r.,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1967): 20-27, esp. 20-21.

¹²⁴ Lenart, “O niektórych doświadczeniach pracy partyjnej,” 12.

¹²⁵ Sznicer, “Kobiety powinny posiadać zawodowe kwalifikacje,” 58. See also Irena Kruczek, “Uczestniczymy w przeobrażeniach gospodarczych i społeczno kulturalnych na ziemi rzeszowskiej,” in *Nowy etap działalności*, 63-68, esp. 64.

¹²⁶ Magdalska, “Trzeba wypracować nowe formy pracy,” 107.

¹²⁷ Janina Suska-Janakowska, “Wkraczamy wszędzie tam gdzie nasza pomoc i inicjatywa jest potrzebna,” in *Nowy etap działalności*, 113-16, quotation on 114.

¹²⁸ Janusz Zawojski, 9 March 1967, File “KW PZPR—Wydział Organizacyjny: Sektor Rad Narodowych i Organizacji Mas., 1959-1970,” sygn. PZPR KW Kr 592, APK. Zofia K. also stated that women felt bitter about this shift since workplace chapters provided them with something valuable. Zofia K., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

properly,” suggesting that tensions had arisen.¹²⁹ Although the newly formed Women’s Council was supposed to bring all of these women’s groups and commissions together, in fact, as Ratman-Liwerska has argued, the decision led to a dispersal of women’s activism and a devaluation of their work.¹³⁰

As early as 1970, working women, sometimes with the support of local party officials, formed workplace chapters in opposition to the 1966 directive, while a few chapters had functioned clandestinely throughout the period.¹³¹ In 1967, even the secretary of a party district committee acknowledged the ongoing existence of League activism in places of employment. In a report on work among women, he stated that formally workplace chapters were dissolved, but the League continued to hold meetings.¹³² Helena C. continued to be a member of a workplace chapter throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Although these chapters were officially disbanded, she claimed that particularly in larger workplaces women continued their activism.¹³³ Bożena N. was a member of a workplace chapter in Łódź until 1968 when she moved to Warsaw.¹³⁴ According to then League president Eugenia Kempara, by 1980 prior to the official reinstatement of workplace chapters, 2,150 such chapters with about 128,000 members operated, demonstrating, she argued, that this form of activism was both attractive and accepted by women.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Władysław Znamirowski, “Informacja: Komitetu Miejskiego PZPR w Jaworznie o realizacji instrukcji Sekretariatu KC PZPR o pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem działalności L.K. w miejscu zamieszkania,” 16 March 1967, File “KW PZPR—Wydział Organizacyjny: Sektor Rad Narodowych i Organizacji Mas., 1959-1970,” sygn. PZPR KW Kr 592, APK.

¹³⁰ Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej aktywizacji kobiet*, 94-95.

¹³¹ “Dyskusja: Obszerne fragmenty wypowiedzi gości i delegatek na VII Krajowym Zjeździe Ligi Kobiet,” Proceedings from the Seventh National League of Women Conference, *Nasza praca*, no. 3-4 (1979): 38-111, esp. 60-62; JAK, “35-letni dorobek: Wykorzystać dla przyszłości,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1981): 8-9; Eugenia Kempara, “Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych: Wprowadzenie do dyskusji przewodniczącej ZGLK,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1981): 9-17, esp. 12; “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1981): 18-28, esp. 18; Jadwiga Biedrzycka, interview, “Za najważniejsze uważam,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 63-64; and Irena H., interview, 18 May 2000.

¹³² Marian Smuga, “Informacja: O realizacji instrukcji Sekretariatu KC PZPR z lutego 1966 r. w sprawie pracy partyjnej wśród kobiet,” 8 March 1967, File “KW PZPR—Wydział Organizacyjny: Sektor Rad Narodowych i Organizacji Mas., 1959-1970,” sygn. PZPR KW Kr 592, APK.

¹³³ Helena C., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

¹³⁴ Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000.

¹³⁵ Eugenia Kempara, “VI Plenum KC PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1980): 3-10, quotation on 8-9.

This activism in the workplace between 1966 and 1981 reveals that some members as well as some local party leaders did not abide by the party resolution and outright resisted policy. It illustrates the lack of centralism in a “centralized” socialist state. Directives from above did not necessarily result in acceptance from below. In these supposedly authoritarian states, authority was resisted, manipulated, and challenged. In workplaces where chapters continued to function, both party and League members created a space for the organization that was in direct opposition to the resolution based on the local community rather than the national directive.

The tension regarding workplace versus residential chapters in the 1960s illustrates that some members openly questioned and resisted party policy. Women exhibited their agency in expressing their dissatisfaction with a reliance on residential chapters, chapters that many employed members viewed as inadequate in serving working women’s needs. They also revealed their discontent with the workplace environment, especially lack of opportunities, discrimination, and inadequate protective legislation. While the party emphasized women’s gender over class with the 1966 directive, members portrayed a strong gender as well as class consciousness. They did not want to lose their workplace gains as workers and their workplace presence as members of a women’s organization.

Demands for a Rebirth of Workplace Chapters in 1981

The open discussions of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s all but disappeared for the next fourteen years. While Poles in general were becoming increasingly frustrated with political and economic life—participating in strikes, demonstrating against price hikes, and forming the Solidarity Movement—the League again had become static, passive, and more closely affiliated with the party, to some degree resembling its position during the stalinist period.¹³⁶ The organization shifted its emphasis from “practical activism” to one that predominantly focused on motherhood and the ideological education of socialist citizens. Not until the early 1980s in the midst of Poland’s economic and political

¹³⁶ On the League’s ties to the party, see, for example, proceedings from the three conferences following the fourth national gathering. Proceedings from the Fifth National League of Women Conference; Proceedings from the Sixth National League of Women Conference; and Proceedings from the Seventh National League of Women Conference.

crisis did members openly reconsider many of the issues that they had raised earlier and introduce new problems that the League and women faced, including the issue of workplace activism.

On 28 November 1981, after more than one year of open discussions in *Nasza praca*, League leaders convened the *VIII Nadzwyczajny Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet* (Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference) only two years after its last national gathering.¹³⁷ Frustrated with the League's position, leaders decided to bring together delegates to discuss the organization's future, elect new officers, and especially work on changing its statute to reflect new concerns for women. They believed that the organization's statute, ratified at the previous conference in 1979, was no longer adequate and did not reflect the group's changing needs and structure.

Part of the League's "renewal" was to revisit the question of where the organization should function and who should represent women. After a brief discussion of the meeting's goals and the organization's history, in her speech Kempara dove into a poignant criticism of the 1966 directive, claiming that "with this one decision, one stroke of the pen," the party restricted the organization's activism and "crushed the League's strength."¹³⁸ This "blow" to women activists, as some women in 1966 feared, had "silenced" and weakened the organization and, according to Kempara, resulted in ongoing gender discrimination in the workforce.¹³⁹ Zofia Drałus, affiliated with the League since 1946 and a member of a League city administration, argued that until 1966 the group had been strong.

¹³⁷ Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference. The League decided to organize this conference during its April 1981 Plenum. "Z myślą o przyszłości: Skróty wprowadzenia do dyskusji przewodniczącej Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Eugenii Kempary," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1981): 1- 11; and "Zjazd przyspieszony—wiosna '82," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1981): 11- 19. The League was not alone in holding a special meeting. The party likewise convened a national conference in 1981 to discuss the economic and political crisis Poland was experiencing and to advocate a "renewal" of the party. "VII Plenum KC PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1981): 2.

¹³⁸ Eugenia Kempara, "Referat programowy: Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 6-21, quotations on 8, 9. Her speech at the 1981 conference differed significantly from her presentation just two years earlier. In 1979, Kempara adhered to what the party deemed acceptable and did not question the League's relationship with the party, internal dynamics, or structure. See Eugenia Kempara, "Referat programowy VII Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet wygłoszony przez przewodniczącą ZGLK tow. Eugenię Kemparę," Proceedings from the Seventh National League of Women Conference, 17-33. In October 1980 at the KC PZPR Plenum, Kempara, however, already exhibited signs of discontent with the 1966 decision. She saw it as an unprecedented limitation of organizational activism. Kempara, "VI Plenum KC PZPR."

¹³⁹ Kempara, "Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych," 11; Kempara, "Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," 10, 15, and Kempara, interview by Borzyszkowa-Sękowska, "Na czele ruchu kobiecego."

Following the resolution, women were “scattered,” “they stopped meeting with each other,” and women’s issues became ignored in workplaces. Furthermore, residential chapters became meeting places mostly for retired women.¹⁴⁰ In an essay contest, Janina Leokadia Żmudzińska, a party and League member, wrote: “I was and am a disciplined citizen of our country, I try to understand all resolutions and orders, but to this day I cannot imagine why in 1966 someone was set on dissolving the League.”¹⁴¹ Although she saw herself as a loyal subject of the state, she, like so many other members, criticized the decisionmakers for this resolution.

Other activists likewise condemned the 1966 directive. “We were stripped of our fundamental activism,” claimed Janina Stolc, president of a provincial administration. “We were left with staircases and a mythical ‘environment’” in which to function.¹⁴² Members often used “*klatki schodowe*” (staircases) as a derogatory symbol of functioning solely in residential chapters. When discussing the change in the statute in 1981, allowing the formation of workplace chapters, Kempara also noted that finally women “would emerge from staircases and backyards.”¹⁴³ As in the mid-1950s’ discussions, these women argued that keeping “staircases” clean, or more broadly focusing on domesticity, was not enough. Once again, women activists viewed activism in residential circles as less important than workplace activism, even though both types of chapters often provided similar programs for women.

Both Melania Mroczek-Szymańska, a long-time prominent member, and Anna Murdza, president of a workplace chapter, implied that if the League had been present in workplaces, Poland’s crisis would have been milder.¹⁴⁴ They claimed that women would have mitigated the strikes that were erupting throughout Poland and would have been more successful in negotiations with the party. Their words depict a gendered perception of women as more peaceful and diplomatic, traditional conceptions

¹⁴⁰ Zofia Drałus and Ilona Sobik, interview by Barbara Kostka, “Przeszłość za nami—przyszłość przed nami,” *Nasza praca*, no. 11 (1985): 12-15, quotation on 13.

¹⁴¹ Janina Leokadia Żmudzińska, “Wspomnienia działaczki PZPR,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1986): 52-56, quotation on 56.

¹⁴² “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1981): 18-28, esp. 22.

¹⁴³ Eugenia Kempara, “Socjalistyczne przemiany z naszym udziałem: Referat przewodniczącej KRKP Eugenii Kemparowej,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (1981): 4-21, quotation on 18.

¹⁴⁴ “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej,” 20-21.

of womanhood. In reality, though, women workers protested price hikes, participated in strikes, and were present in workplaces where strikes occurred.¹⁴⁵

Małgorzata Udowska, a conference delegate, contended that women's lives would have been made easier with the presence of the League in workplaces. With the liquidation of these chapters, she claimed, men made decisions about women's work: where they worked, how much they got paid, and even if they should work outside of the home. In her opinion, "there are issues," such as women's employment, "which women have to take care of themselves, in order not to be left behind."¹⁴⁶ She suggested that the League's presence on the shop floor would have made this possible. But in the years 1956 to 1966, members' persistent criticisms of the workplace environment revealed that even with the presence of the League working women continued to face difficulties at work. The difference was that women had an organization to which they could turn.

The League revised its statute following the 1980 plenum and restored workplace chapters on 1 January 1981. Members made the decision quickly, suggesting that this issue had been weighing heavily on their minds. The statute allowed the organization not only to reinstate workplace chapters but also to form groups based on occupation or mutual interests. By ratifying this decision, the League again had given itself the right to represent all women in Poland. Party officials showed no visible dissatisfaction with this transformation, even though they had given the directive in 1966. They may have viewed the League's decision as beneficial to the state's position within the workplace. By possibly appeasing a large segment of the working population, they may have seen a reinstatement of workplace chapters as a way in which to alleviate some of the turmoil occurring across Poland. With a history of often following the party line, the League may also have served as another avenue that the

¹⁴⁵ Women's activism and concerns differed from men's to some degree. Women were especially concerned with issues related to food availability, shelter, and clothing in their demands. According to Polish sociologist Renata Siemieńska, "women tended to support men rather than actually engage in strikes themselves." Renata Siemieńska, "Dialogue: Polish Women and Polish Politics since World War II," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 1 (spring 1991): 108-25, quotation on 119. On women's involvement in the opposition and strikes, see, for example, Long, *We All Fought for Freedom*; Barbara Wolfe Jancar, "Women in the Opposition in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s," in *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 168-85; Reading, *Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism*; and Renata Siemieńska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," *Women and Politics* 6, no. 4 (winter 1986): 5-35, esp. 29.

¹⁴⁶ "Dyskusja," Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 22-44, quotation on 33.

party would have to dissatisfied and noncompliant workers. Finally, by 1981 the League's influence and strength had weakened to such an extent that party leaders may have seen the organization's transition as unimportant, particularly in the midst of larger issues with which they had to contend.

Following the decision to rebuild workplace circles, members realized that the task would be difficult. Some managers, trade unions, and party officials were reluctant to accept the organization. In the words of one delegate, "currently there is no acceptance and recognition, since no one wants to deal with us, and often . . . [they] completely ignore our presence."¹⁴⁷ Women's commissions were barely functioning and "Solidarity' and other unions do not see the need for the League's activism in" workplaces.¹⁴⁸ The League claimed that women were much more concerned about obtaining adequate food and other necessities for their families than being active in a women's organization.¹⁴⁹ In part, this claim is correct, but women also probably did not want to be active or to join for the same reasons that party members were leaving the party. Given the economic and political conditions in the early 1980s, Poles were more likely to leave organizations affiliated with the party rather than join. It increasingly became unpopular to be a party member and more popular to support Solidarity and the Catholic Church, two institutions that worked closely together in opposition to the party.¹⁵⁰ During the first half of 1981, the Polish News Agency indicated that over two hundred thousand, mostly rank-and-file members, left the party.¹⁵¹ The League was becoming increasingly unpopular among women as well.

Members' demands for the reinstatement of workplace chapters point to how women resisted the situation in which the organization had been placed by the party one and a half decades earlier. The state and other workplace groups were inadequate in assisting women in their daily lives, and League members desired a central role in aiding women. Once again, they emphasized their gender and class consciousness and demanded that both be recognized by the state.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁸ "Zjazd przyspieszony," 14.

¹⁴⁹ "Uchwała Głównego Ligi Kobiet zwołaniu VIII Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu Krajowego Ligi Kobiet i rozpoczęciu kampanii sprawozdawczo-wyborczej," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1981): 10-11.

¹⁵⁰ Siemieńska also has mentioned that in the early 1980s other political and semipolitical organizations lost membership. Siemieńska, "Dialogue," 114.

¹⁵¹ Stefancic, *Robotnik*, 77.

“Nothing about Us without Us”: Members Once Again Voice Their Opinions in the 1980s

In addition to revisiting the question of where the League should function, members entered other discussions regarding the League’s past and direction for the future. These discussions resembled those that took place more than two decades earlier. Once again, they called for openness, honesty, assertiveness, and independence, illustrating their belief that these had not prevailed in preceding years. Members negotiated and challenged the League’s role, ties to the state, and importance for women. And, they criticized women’s ongoing and, in some cases growing, discrimination in politics and employment. As one member stated, the League “was saucy” in the 1980s, and women “had a lot to say.”¹⁵²

The League’s president strongly criticized the organization for not having done enough for women, especially during the year of crisis:

We were not among women on the coast during the August days!¹⁵³
We were not among female textile workers, who along with their children marched onto the streets of Łódź. We were not there before, during, or after their protests.¹⁵⁴
We were also not among the women in Żyrardów during their long strike!¹⁵⁵
We know the results of their desperate decision not from their lips but from general information.¹⁵⁶

This silence and inactivity, Kempara declared, had to end. Members sought an organization that was “combative,” “unconstrained,” “spontaneous,” “independent,” “energetic,” “open,” and “flexible,” similar to their demands in 1956.¹⁵⁷ As in 1956 they did not expect the organization to be fully

¹⁵² Danuta B., interview by author, 2 June 2000, Nowy Targ.

¹⁵³ In August 1980, a general strike, led by Lech Wałęsa, erupted in the Gdańsk shipyards, followed by negotiations between management and workers and the formation of the Interfactory Strike Committee and later the NSZZ (Independent Self-Managed Trade Unions, or “Solidarity”).

¹⁵⁴ In July 1980, strikes erupted in numerous cities, including Łódź, in response to increases in food prices. Stefancic, *Robotnik*, chap. 4.

¹⁵⁵ In the city of Żyrardów, approximately twelve thousand textile workers, mostly women, participated in a strike to demand adequate food supplies. See Ash, *Polish Revolution*, 248-49; and Jancar, “Women in the Opposition.”

¹⁵⁶ Kempara, “Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19, 21; “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference; “Uchwała Programowa VIII Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu Krajowego Ligi Kobiet,” in *ibid.*, 239

autonomous, but by conveying these demands, they suggested that their group's activism had been the direct opposite: noncombative, constrained, planned, dependent on the party, lifeless, closed, and inflexible. They demanded a different type of activism, particularly during a period when people across Poland, including women, increasingly exhibited a spirit of combativeness and resistance. The League did not want to be left out from this new spirit. At the April 1981 plenum, one member compared the League to the independent trade union Solidarity and suggested that Solidarity was successful due to its focus on activism, while the League was lagging behind because it had been more concerned about its structure rather than what it actually accomplished. She feared that if the League did not change the situation, it would lose its legitimacy and influence.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, when sections of Solidarity began to form in 1980 in workplaces, numerous of its members were former League workplace activists from before the 1966 transition. And, Anna Walentynowicz, one of the leading female Solidarity activists, had previously been a League member.¹⁵⁹ Helena Sprengel, a member from Gdańsk, where the League was especially vocal during this period, probably following the lead of what was happening in the shipyards, stated that the League "cannot be a begging organization but a demanding one."¹⁶⁰

As in the mid-1950s, members called for an activism that represented women's interests and more specifically that was directed at women's employment, economic, and political rights. Women persistently complained about the lack of equality between the sexes, particularly in the workforce and politics. League leaders once again questioned the reality of women's equality. Equality, most argued, was far from realized, although it existed on paper.¹⁶¹ Most often, they complained about four issues

45-50; Kempara, "Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych," 9; "Zapis dyskusji plenarnej," 20; Kempara, "Socjalistyczne przemiany z naszym udziałem," 14; "Zjazd przyspieszony," 19; Members from Gdańsk, interview by Elżbieta Banasiak, "Czy Związek Kobiet Polskich?" *Przyjaciółka*, no. 13 (29 March 1981): 7; "Głos w ważnych sprawach społecznych," *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (1981): 1-4, esp. 4; and "Czy i jaki ruch kobiecy," *Przyjaciółka*, no. 51-52 (21-28 December 1981): 4.

¹⁵⁸ "Zjazd przyspieszony," 19.

¹⁵⁹ Siemieńska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," 31; Zofia Sokół, *Prasa kobieca w Polsce w latach 1945-95* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1998), 140; and Ratman-Liwerska, *Stowarzyszenie jako czynnik społeczno-wychowawczej kobiet*, 162-63.

¹⁶⁰ Members from Gdańsk, interview by Banasiak, "Czy Związek Kobiet Polskich?"

¹⁶¹ For some examples, see Eugenia Kempara, "O miejsce kobiety w społeczeństwie," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1981): 1-8, esp. 7; "Rezolucja ogólnopolskiego przedzjazdowego forum kobiet," *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1981): 8-12, esp. 8-9; "Uchwała programowa VIII Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu," 45-46; Jadwiga Biedrzycka, "Referat przewodniczącej Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich—Jadwigi

related to women's inequality: lower compensation for the same work as men; lower pay in feminized sectors; unequal access to managerial positions and limited decision making power in the workplace; and treatment of women as a reserve labor force. They called for official studies of women's workplace conditions and asked that party leaders remedy the situation.¹⁶² At a national meeting for workplace chapters, a president of a chapter in an electrical plant asserted much of what the League wanted to achieve for working women. Women "want to be partners in the economic administration and political organizations, they want to be treated as equal workers. Compliments in celebration of 8 March with flowers and slogans "woman is the support of the home" is no longer enough for women. Women want for their proposals, demands, [and] propositions to be examined with consideration and understanding, they want their employment qualifications and experience to be valued in the system of advancement and distinctions."¹⁶³

What is most interesting about these sentiments is that members expressed these views during a period of crisis when party and Solidarity leaders, male workers, and the media encouraged women to return home and leave employment for men. Unlike other periods of the League's history, the League did not follow the party's (or Solidarity's) ideas about women's position but instead created its own direction. The organization was unwilling, this time, to sit back and quietly submit to women's relegation to the home. It is also interesting that at the same time that the League was calling for these changes, women in the underground movement largely ignored women's issues and instead focused on issues that were seen as most important for the population as a whole.¹⁶⁴

A common criticism that women expressed was unequal pay for equal work.¹⁶⁵ Women continued to receive lower salaries than men in the 1980s; in 1980, for example, they were paid 33

Biedrzyckiej," *Nasza praca*, no 1 (1986): 41-47, esp. 45; "Delegatkom pod rozważę," *Zwierciadło*, no. 29 (16 July 1981): 3; and Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, interview by author, Kraków, 9 June 2000.

¹⁶² "Wniosek skierowany do rady d.s. rodziny—w sprawie opracowania raportu o sytuacji, warunkach życia i potrzebach kobiet w PRL," *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (1981): 13-14, esp. 13.

¹⁶³ "Coraz mocniej zaznaczamy swoją obecność w zakładach pracy: Omówienie dyskusyjne," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1983): 44-47, quotation on 44.

¹⁶⁴ Penn, *Podziemie kobiet*.

¹⁶⁵ Eugenia Kempara, "Nic o nas bez nas: Wystąpienie na VII Plenum KC PZPR," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1981): 3-7, esp. 4; Kempara, "Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych," 15; "O sytuacji kobiet w Polsce: Materiały informacyjne KRKP," *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (1981): 21- 40, esp. 24; "Problemy kobiet są naszymi problemami," *Nasza praca*, no. 1 (1983): 48-50; "Program działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich na 241

percent less than men.¹⁶⁶ Throughout the communist period, Renata Siemieńska has shown, women made between 20 to 40 percent less than men; and the higher the position, the larger the discrepancy.¹⁶⁷ As one woman stated at a meeting to form a workplace chapter, ““Here, they do not pay us based on our work but on our sex. Of course at women’s expense.”¹⁶⁸ Hand in hand with unequal pay for equal work was a criticism of lower salaries in traditionally female areas of employment.¹⁶⁹ At the VII Plenum of the party’s Central Committee in 1980, Kempara made some forceful statements about women’s lower pay. “Light industry,” she claimed, “only has an innocent name, but research has proven that the effort, for example, of a saleswoman in the traditional grocery business is equal to the effort of a welder,” a traditionally male position, and therefore should be compensated equally.¹⁷⁰

Members repeatedly complained about women’s lack of advancement opportunities and decisionmaking authority.¹⁷¹ As Honorata Koprowska, president of a provincial administration, stated: “Of course, on the lowest decision making levels we can find them [women]. But the higher, so much

lata 1986-1990 przyjęty na IX Krajowym Zjeździe,” *Nasza praca*, no. 12 (1986): 17-24, esp. 18; “Koło Ligi Kobiet Polskich współgospodarzem zakładu pracy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1987): 27-30, esp. 27; “Awans kobiet,” *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1987): 57-59; “Uchwała programowa VIII Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu Krajowego Ligi Kobiet Polskich,” 29 November 1981, File “Historia Ligi Kobiet,” in personal possession of Barbara K.; “Omówienie dyskusji,” *Nasza praca*, no. 7-8 (1984): 78-87, esp. 83; and Gertruda Uścińska, “Sytuacja społeczno-prawna kobiet pracujących w Polsce (1),” *Nasza praca*, no. 3 (1988): 22-25, esp. 23. On unequal pay, see also Wieruszewski, *Równość kobiet i mężczyzn*, 140-49.

¹⁶⁶ “Omówienie dyskusji,” 84.

¹⁶⁷ Renata Siemieńska, *Pleć, zawód, polityka: Kobiety w życiu publicznym w Polsce* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Socjologii, 1990), 95.

¹⁶⁸ Jackowska, “Powrót do zakładów pracy,” 26.

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, “Wniosek skierowany do rady d.s. rodziny,” 13; and “Sprawie awansu zawodowego i społecznego kobiet było poświęcone posiedzenie Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet Polskich, zorganizowane 24 lutego br.,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (1988): 12-17, esp. 14. Polish sociologists had been discussing feminization of work and pay inequity as early as the 1960s. See, for example, Danuta Graniewska, *Awans zawodowy kobiet a fazy życia rodzinnego* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1985), 10-13, 50; Henryk Domański, *Zadowolony niewolnik? Studium o nierównościach między mężczyznami i kobietami w Polsce* (Warsaw: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, Polska Akademia Nauk, 1992), chap. 5; Jerzy Piotrowski, “Szczególne zagadnienia pracy zawodowej kobiet poza domem,” in *Kobieta współczesna*, 15-43; Waluk, “O płacy kobiet w Polsce,” and Waluk, *Placa i praca kobiet w Polsce*. As Siemieńska has stated, studies conducted in the early 1980s showed that the sex of an employee determined his or her pay more than any other factors, including “education, work position, age, length of work, and PZPR membership.” Siemieńska, *Pleć, zawód, polityka*, 96.

¹⁷⁰ Kempara, “Nic o nas bez nas,” 4.

¹⁷¹ This type of criticism was also emerging in sociological studies. See, for example, Graniewska, *Awans zawodowy kobiet*. See also Siemieńska, *Pleć, zawód, polityka*, chap. 4.

the worse. It is time to change this.”¹⁷² Throughout Eastern Europe, even in traditionally feminized sectors, men disproportionately filled upper-level positions.¹⁷³ For example, in the 1960s in Poland, 70 percent of the workforce in banking but only 4 percent of bank directors, were women.¹⁷⁴ Women made up 70 percent of the textile industry in the 1970s, but almost all “directors, managers, and experts” were men.¹⁷⁵ Even with the same or even higher skills than men, women had more difficulty in advancing and more was expected from female candidates to higher positions than from male candidates, members claimed.¹⁷⁶ One League member stated that “one will be able to talk about actual equality only when we stop talking about women in managerial positions as something peculiar” or noteworthy but rather as “something normal.”¹⁷⁷

Members likewise began openly to express dissatisfaction with the treatment of women workers as a reserve labor force.¹⁷⁸ Not only the state but the League also had treated women as a secondary workforce that was called to and released from employment as the economy demanded. Maria Krawczyk, a Bydgoszcz provincial administration member, provided an overview, stating ““In the 50s . . . women were urged to work. Today one calls forth: Irene go home! Because there are economic problems, because we need to decrease employment. We are treated as a reserve labor force and depending on the situation of the economy marked voices call out for or against women’s employment mobilization.””¹⁷⁹ Members demanded that as citizens women, not the economy, should

¹⁷² “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej,” 24-25.

¹⁷³ Numerous scholars have pointed to this well-documented discrepancy. See, for example, Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, esp. chap. 4.

¹⁷⁴ “Awans kobiety,” *Kobieta i życie* (11 September 1966): 10, 11, 13; “Kłopoty z awansem,” *Kobieta i życie* (22 February 1970): 14; and *Trybuna ludu*, 8 March 1967, 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Życie gospodarcze*, 12 March 1972, 1, 6; and *Trybuna ludu*, 23 May 1970, 3.

¹⁷⁶ “Zjazd przyspieszony,” 15; “O awansie zawodowym i społecznym kobiet—stan aktualny i perspektywy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (1988): 4-11; and “Sprawie awansu zawodowego i społecznego kobiet.”

¹⁷⁷ “Sprawie awansu zawodowego i społecznego,” 16.

¹⁷⁸ See, for example, Kempara, “Z myślą o przyszłości,” 9; and Kempara, “Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 10.

¹⁷⁹ “Zjazd przyspieszony,” 15.

have the right to choose if and when they wanted to work outside the home, based on personal desires and needs.¹⁸⁰ In fact, between 1980 and 1982, women's actual employment did decrease somewhat.¹⁸¹

For the first time, members were especially critical of the lack of equality within the party, and they demanded that their voices be heard, particularly on issues dealing with women. "Nothing about us without us," the title of a speech that Kempara presented at the Seventh Plenum of the party's Central Committee in December 1980, grasped the essence of the League's grievances with the party. Kempara asked: "what is happening with women's equality in our country?" She was frustrated with women's growing absence from the political system. The number of female ministers of state and directors had declined, and women were overlooked for many positions on new committees that were being formed to deal with the crisis, she argued.¹⁸² Kempara accused officials of deliberately not searching for "willing and intelligent" women to serve in various positions that opened up during these transformations.¹⁸³ Furthermore, while women made up 27 percent of the party, they comprised only 5 percent of the delegates present at the party's national conference, a gender imbalance that she sought to remedy.¹⁸⁴ The League, she declared, did not "want to wait for the occasional Eighth of March gestures encouraging 'holiday' discussions"; its members wished to participate actively in these talks throughout the year.¹⁸⁵ Kempara was especially critical of the party when she stated that the road to

¹⁸⁰ Kempara, "O miejsce kobiety w społeczeństwie," 5; "Liga Kobiet domaga się," *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1981): 38-42, esp. 39; "Chcemy reprezentować interesy kobiet polskich," Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 28-31; and Kempara, "Z myślą o przyszłości," 10.

¹⁸¹ Adam Kurzynowski, "Aktywność zawodowa kobiet w 40-leciu PRL," in *Kobiety polskie: Praca zbiorowa*, ed. Elżbieta Konecka (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), 300-28, esp. 306.

¹⁸² Kempara, "Nic o nas bez nas," 3. See also Kempara, "Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," 14; "Dyskusja," Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference; Irena Hamerska, "Organizacja kobieca: Jaka być powinna? Jaka będzie?" *Nasza praca*, no. 9 (1981): 7-10, esp. 9; and "Rezolucja ogólnopolskiego przedjazdowego forum kobiet."

¹⁸³ Kempara, "Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," 15. Just two years earlier at the 1979 conference, Kempara indicated that women had significant opportunities within the party and made no complaints of the League's relationship with the party. Kempara, "Referat programowy VII Krajowego Zjazdu Ligi Kobiet," 21.

¹⁸⁴ Eugenia Kempara, "Pod znakiem przygotowań do zjazdu," *Nasza praca*, no. 8 (1981): 1-6; and Kempara, "O miejsce kobiety w społeczeństwie," 2.

¹⁸⁵ Kempara, "Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet," 15.

democracy within the party continued to be long.¹⁸⁶ In a state that claimed to espouse and advocate democratic beliefs and equality, her words were particularly harsh. She, along with other members, blamed party officials directly for their role in restricting women's access to political discussions. The socialist state, in her view, was deliberately not living up to its promises for women, and women demanded a transformation of the situation. Members did have something to be distressed about. At the party's congress, for the first time, officials did not include a quota for women's participation as delegates, which resulted in 50 percent fewer female delegates.¹⁸⁷ In the early 1980s, on the local party level, women's participation dropped from about 20 percent to 10-15 percent.¹⁸⁸

Dissatisfaction with the party's tendency to overlook both the organization and women's needs figured into members' comments. They were "disturbed" by the party's omission and marginal treatment of women's lives at the party's conference and in official documents.¹⁸⁹ Maria Grabska, for instance, complained that officials did not attend the League's conference after the first day's proceedings, exhibiting their lack of recognition of the importance of the meeting as well as women's needs. She believed that delegates should not be talking only among themselves. "Those who govern us should be here," she declared, "to hear what women, 50 percent of the population, demand."¹⁹⁰ Some members claimed that the organization had been weakened over the years, because officials ignored the group and continued to do so in the early 1980s.¹⁹¹ But at the same time, they called for greater

¹⁸⁶ Kempara, "O miejsce kobiety w społeczeństwie," 2.

¹⁸⁷ Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market*, 159-60; and Siemieńska, "Women and Social Movements in Poland," 31-32.

¹⁸⁸ Siemieńska, "Women in Social Movements in Poland," 32. Numerous studies that focus on the postcommunist period stress that women's presence in politics decreased significantly after 1989, but in fact this started to occur within the party in the 1980s.

¹⁸⁹ "Z myślą o przyszłości," 9; "Uchwała: Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet z 7 kwietnia 1981 r. wyrażająca stanowisko organizacji w sprawach ogólnospołecznych," *Nasza praca*, no. 6 (1981): 26-28; "Rezolucja ogólnopolskiego przedjazdowego forum kobiet"; and Kempara, "Nic o nas bez nas."

¹⁹⁰ "Dyskusja," Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 42.

¹⁹¹ "Zjazd przyspieszony," 14.

independence from the party. Kempera maintained that League members should make decisions “about future programs, structure, . . . and name,” implying that they had not done so previously.¹⁹²

League leaders advocated changes within the system but not a complete eradication of socialism. As Kempara noted, “we are all for changes, for a democratic life, for the return of the radiance of an ideal socialism.”¹⁹³ They continued to support the party and the socialist state for a number of reasons. The organization had already invested its energy into the socialist state and the party, and many members, including most of the Central Administration, were also party members. They also may have seen hope in the party’s “renewal.” And, in addition to membership dues, the organization financed most activities through funds received from the party. If the League decided to rebel more openly, party leaders quite possibly would have cut off financial support, thereby limiting what the organization was capable of accomplishing. Because of its dependence on party funds, the organization, according to some members, had to include such words as “socialism” and “party” in its declarations and had to support the current political system.¹⁹⁴

During the economic crisis, members also wanted the party to aid women in coping with everyday struggles of providing food and necessities for their families and obtaining adequate apartments. Especially after the introduction of Martial Law on 12 December 1981, shelves in stores typically were empty or filled with only a few often nonessential items, Poles stood in excruciatingly long lines to buy whatever stores were selling at the time, and the state issued ration cards with which people were to acquire necessities. Women, the League claimed, carried the burden of this crisis more than men. They stood in the long lines, they prepared meals from the limited foods that were available, and each time the state increased prices, they reevaluated their family budgets.¹⁹⁵ To accomplish these

¹⁹² Kempara, “Socjalistyczne przemiany z naszym udziałem,” 18. Interestingly, some party officials also supported allowing more independence to women’s organizations. At the Women’s Council Plenum in January 1981, Stanisław Gabrielski, a Central Committee member, maintained that women should make the decisions about the formation of the women’s movement. “Głos w ważnych sprawach społecznych,” *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (1981): 1-4, esp. 4.

¹⁹³ Kempara, “Socjalistyczne przemiany z naszym udziałem,” 9. See also “Deklaracja ideowo-programowa,” *Nasza praca*, no. 10 (1981): 14- 16, esp. 16.

¹⁹⁴ Hamerska, “Organizacja kobieca.”

¹⁹⁵ “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference; Kempara, “Socjalistyczne przemiany z naszym udziałem,” 13; Kempara, “O miejsce kobiety w społeczeństwie”; “Uchwała Głównego Ligi Kobiet zwołaniu VIII Nadzwyczajnego Zjazdu

tasks, women spent a lot of their energy and time on “arranging” or “taking care of” (“*zalatwiać*”) things.¹⁹⁶ Maria Wamka, a conference delegate, asked pointedly: “Mr. Minister Krasieński, how do you imagine running a household with many children” under such conditions?¹⁹⁷ She directly indicated that state officials were not accomplishing enough to ease women’s burdens, and, as a result, women needed to be involved in discussions on the state economy. “Polish women, their position in society and family, as well as their work and everyday living conditions” must take precedence, explained Jadwiga Biedrzycka (the newly elected president during the conference), over assisting the state in social services, a task that the League often set as its top priority. The state, not the League, above all, she claimed, was responsible for these services.¹⁹⁸ Her assessment about state responsibility for social services is in direct contrast to the claim that Musiałowa made in the 1957, stating that women had been mistaken about thinking that the state would be responsible for such services. Musiałowa had suggested that it was the League’s responsibility to take on some of these tasks. Here, instead, Biedrzycka directly placed the duty on the state, not the women’s organization. The state, she and other members maintained, neglected women’s needs during this critical period.

Kempara’s speech “Nothing about Us without Us” sums up the general sentiment of the League as an organization during the 1980s. The League and especially its president repeatedly maintained that women must have a voice in determining their political and economic rights. The state had a responsibility to ensure that women’s needs were met. These ongoing demands illustrate clearly the League’s newfound assertiveness in presenting and promoting women’s interests.

Krajowego”; “Rezolucja ogólnopolskiego przedzjazdowego forum kobiet”; and Kempara, “Pod znakiem przygotowań do zjazdu.”

¹⁹⁶ As Kristi Long has stated: “*Zalatwiać*’ refers to all sorts of unofficial activities involved in the procurement of these necessities—barter, bribery, purchase on black markets, the exchanging of favors, and so forth.” Long, *We All Fought for Freedom*, 23. Janine Wedel has maintained that “to wangle” or “to finagle” are more appropriate translations. Janine Wedel, *The Private Poland* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), 41.

¹⁹⁷ “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 32. Zdzisław Krasieński was a member of the Ministerial Council (*Rady Ministrów*) and the president of the National Commission on Prices in the early 1980s. Tadeusz Mołdawa, *Ludzie władzy, 1944-1991: Władze państwowe i polityczne Polski według stanu na dzień 28 II 1991* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1991), 379.

¹⁹⁸ “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference, 25.

The League of Polish Women: A New Name

In the early 1980s, members engaged in heated debates over the importance of the organization for women, and some favored changing the group's name. These issues became central to defining the position of the League in the changing Polish society. A group of members in Gdańsk, the birthplace of the Solidarity Movement, initiated the discussion surrounding the alteration of the League's name and proposed *Związek Kobiet Polskich* (Union of Polish Women) as the new name.¹⁹⁹ As secretary of the Central Administration Weronika Jackowska put it, there was a tendency during this period of crisis to “throw away everything that was ‘old,’” even if it had been beneficial. The League was swept up by these trends.²⁰⁰ Those advocating the change believed that this new name would reflect a movement away from the silence and passivity of the past fourteen years and convey the message that the League turned to a more ambitious and serious program for women. This name would also attract a new generation of women activists, since “young female activists do not want to be ‘*ligawki*’ (Leaguers).”²⁰¹ Not only the name but also the group's structure would be changed. The Union would become a massive women's organization, representing all women's groups in Poland, including the Circles of Rural Housewives, women's cooperatives, and the Women's Council. As a massive group, the supporters of the change claimed that women would be able to accomplish more.²⁰² The Gdańsk group suggested the name Union of Polish Women to symbolize both the unity of all women in the word “union” and the new patriotic spirit within Poland in the inclusion of “Polish.”²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ On discussions of the name change, see especially “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej”; “Z myślą o przyszłości,” 3; “Zjazd przyspieszony,” 12-15; Kempara, “Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych”; Members from Gdańsk, interview by Banasiak, “Czy Związek Kobiet Polskich?” 7.

²⁰⁰ Weronika Jackowska, “Trudne sprawy,” *Nasza praca*, no. 5 (1981): 12-16, quotation on 13.

²⁰¹ “Zjazd przyspieszony,” 13. See also Kempara, “Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 18; “O sytuacji kobiet w Polsce,” 37; and Members from Gdańsk, interview by Banasiak, “Czy Związek Kobiet Polskich?”

²⁰² “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej,” 23; “Zjazd przyspieszony,” 13; and “O sytuacji kobiet w Polsce,” 37.

²⁰³ Members from Gdańsk, interview by Banasiak, “Czy Związek Kobiet Polskich?” A couple of my interviewees stated that members wanted a name change since they simply wanted to identify the League as Polish; there were many Leagues of Women throughout the world. Barbara K., interview; and Wanda K., interview by author, Nowa Huta, 15 June 2000.

Not surprisingly, not all members supported this transformation. Statements of pride in the organization figured prominently among those who opposed the change. Secretary of the Kraków provincial administration Joanna Sendor, for example, asserted that “the League had never compromised itself. On the contrary—it has traditions of which it could only be proud.”²⁰⁴ In defense of preserving the name, supporters argued that the League had accomplished a lot for women even during difficult years, the name was already well-known internationally, and young women continued to join.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, women from other groups expressed opposition for fear of being monopolized by a new massive organization. Only through a variety of women’s groups would women’s multifaceted interests be represented adequately, they argued.²⁰⁶ Kempara stated that these ideas about forming a single massive organization was hurting the League. “Often based on individual members’ pronouncements and presentations of personal views” the League was being cast as an organization that “wants to make democracy using nondemocratic methods” by prohibiting the existence of other women’s organizations.²⁰⁷ The name change was one of the most important topics on the agenda at the conference. Members decided to compromise by preserving the name League of Women and incorporating “Polish” in its title. The addition reflected the growing emphasis on nationalism within Eastern Europe. The new name, the League of Polish Women, has persisted to the present day.

Debates over a name change went hand in hand with an emerging discussion of the existence of the organization altogether, a topic that members had explored briefly in the mid-1950s. After many years of receiving little attention in the popular press, in 1980 the League appeared as a topic of interest not only in such popular women’s magazines as *Zwierciadło* (Mirror), *Przyjaciółka* (Girlfriend), and *Kobieta i życie* (Woman and Life) but also in other mainstream publications. To the detriment of the League, this newfound interest centered on the question of whether or not the organization continued to

²⁰⁴ “Zapis dyskusji plenarnej,” 26. See also Kempara, “Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych,” 14; and “Uchwała: Podjęta przez Plenum ZWLK Częstochowa w dniu 26.03.1981 r.,” 1981, File “Protokóły i posiedzenia plenarnych Zarządu Wojew., 1981-1982,” sygn. 11, Archiwum Państwowy w Częstochowie, Częstochowa.

²⁰⁵ Kempara, “Referat programowy Prezydium ustępującego Zarządu Głównego Ligi Kobiet,” 18; “Dyskusja,” Proceedings from the Eighth Extraordinary National League of Women Conference; “Zjazd przyspieszony,” 13; and Kempara, “Czeka nas wiele spraw trudnych,” 14.

²⁰⁶ “O sytuacji kobiet w Polsce,” 37; “Zjazd przyspieszony”; “Z myślą o przyszłości,” 4; and Zofia Boczkowska, “A może Liga Mężczyzn?” *Przyjaciółka*, no. 15 (12 April 1981): 10

²⁰⁷ “Z myślą o przyszłości,” 4.

be needed. Articles criticizing the League made several, often contradictory, claims: that the League was an anachronistic organization and was no longer necessary since women already had reached equality; that women's issues should be dealt with in conjunction with men's in mutual organizations, rather than in a separate women's group; and that the League had accomplished little for women and therefore served no purpose in women's lives.²⁰⁸

Numerous members responded to these opinions, illustrating their deep attachment to and concern for their organization. Not surprisingly, they were unsettled by these pronouncements. They defended the League and stated that they had nothing about which to be embarrassed.²⁰⁹ They felt uneasy about this new interest and claimed that they alone had the right to decide whether or not their group was necessary.²¹⁰ Teresa Elmerych, Central Administration secretary, was especially angered by these sentiments. "Why are they attacking it [the League] so unrelentingly if there is no reason for its existence and it means nothing in society?" she asked. "Are they afraid that most women might have a different opinion? After all if it is not needed, it will die a natural death due to a lack of members, and if it means nothing—is it worth it to waste time and paper to write about it? Or maybe this preoccupation is a typical pretext to get rid of an organization that is uncomfortable for someone?" (as was the case in workplace chapters in 1966).²¹¹ According to Elmerych, those who spoke negatively of the League were people who were not familiar with the group and who had never needed the organization's assistance; women who came for assistance but were unable to receive it because their needs were beyond what the League could offer; men who opposed their wives', mothers', and

²⁰⁸ For some examples of these articles and the League's assessment of them, see "O sytuacji kobiet w Polsce"; Teresa Elmerych, "Czy trzeba się wstydzić Ligi Kobiet?" *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (1981): 1-10 (The same article appeared in Teresa Elmerych, "Czy trzeba się wstydzić Ligi Kobiet?" *Przyciółka*, no. 14 [5 April 1981]: 10); Joanna Sendor, "Co nam daje Liga Kobiet?" *Nasza praca*, no. 4 (1981): 10-14; Anna Walentynowicz (prominent Solidarity member), interview by Anna Lubowska, "Blisko człowieka," *Przyciółka*, no. 5 (1 February 1981): 10; B. M., "Na marginesie plenarnych obrad Krajowej Rady Kobiet Polskich," *Przyciółka*, no. 6 (8 February 1981): 4; and Ruta Pragier, "Komu jest, a komu może być potrzebna Liga Kobiet," *Przyciółka*, no. 6 (8 February 1981): 10.

²⁰⁹ Krystyna Mojkowska and Wanda Tycner, "Ruch kobiecy w ślepych zaułku?" *Zwierciadło*, no. 5 (29 January 1981): 2; Krystyna Stachowicz, "Nie likwidować tego, co sprawdzone," *Zwierciadło*, no. 7 (12 February 1981): 5; M. S., "Zachęcamy do dyskusji," *Nasza praca*, no. 2-3 (1981): 57-60; and Elmerych, "Czy trzeba się wstydzić Ligi Kobiet?" Bożena N. and Wanda K. likewise expressed these sentiments. Bożena N., interview, 1 June 2000; and Wanda K., interview.

²¹⁰ "Z myślą o przyszłości," 4.

²¹¹ Elmerych, "Czy trzeba się wstydzić Ligi Kobiet?" 1.

daughters' membership in an organization that supported women's rights; and men who the League directed to treatment against alcoholism or who the League demanded to pay child support.²¹² "It is not true," she continued, "that we do not exist and that the women's organization is not needed."²¹³ She, along with other members, sought to defend the League against such sentiments.

In the debate over the League's existence, members engaged in discussions regarding equality on paper versus equality in reality. Sendor, for instance, maintained that paradoxically the organization's ultimate goal was to work toward its liquidation. Once equality was reached, a separate women's organization would no longer be necessary, similar to the idea that once communism was achieved, the state would be liquidated. Poland, however, had not reached that point yet, and the road ahead remained long, she argued.²¹⁴ Members also criticized an article, "Together or separate," that appeared in *Kobieta i życie*. In this piece, Barbara Sidorczuk stated that women should be working within other organizations instead of a separate group. Men, after all, did not have men's groups. In response, League members argued that working together was not yet possible. Women continued to work in lower positions; daycare facilities were built to aid women, not families; and women were often forgotten in workplace improvements.²¹⁵ These members maintained that the League continued to be needed as a means to reach equality between women and men.

Some members returned to the depiction of some women as "backward." In defense of the organization, Mojowska and Tycner, for example, argued that "educated, enlightened, intelligent" women from big cities needed the League to a lesser degree. "These women—lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists—" were able to solve their problems on their own. They joined the organization not to benefit from it but to provide assistance to other, less educated women. "Backward" women who needed the League had minimal education; worked in factories; did not travel beyond their workplace, stores, and immediate residential community; and often had alcoholic husbands. "These

²¹² Ibid., 8.

²¹³ Ibid., 3-4.

²¹⁴ Sendor, "Co nam daje Liga Kobiet?" For similar sentiments, see also Mojowska and Tycner, "Ruch kobiecy w ślepych zaułku?"; Stachowicz, "Nie likwidować tego, co sprawdzone"; and Zespół *Zwierciadła*, "Delegatkom pod rozwagę: Na IX Zjazd Partii," *Zwierciadło*, no. 29 (16 July 1981): 3.

²¹⁵ "Razem czy osobno," *Nasza praca*, no 2-3 (1981): 60-65, quotation on 61. See also M. S., "Zachęcamy do dyskusji," 58.

women,” they claimed, “were not always able to cope on their own” and were unfamiliar with their rights. They especially needed the organization.²¹⁶ Again, members differentiated between educated women and “backward” women, but this time, women who had been depicted as “enlightened” in earlier assessments—women workers in factories—became “backward” and housewives were not mentioned at all. In their view, the working class no longer represented the most enlightened segment of the population, ideas reminiscent of nineteenth-century liberalism.

After many years of working in the party’s shadows, the League experienced yet another period in which its members debated its right to represent women. In the midst of historic transformations within Poland, and in Eastern Europe more generally, the League became wrapped up in the general spirit and redefined (and renamed) their organization. Although the League has survived to the present day, this redefinition may have come too late for most women in Poland.

Conclusion

The League did not attempt to overhaul the traditional gender system or the political structure in Poland. It was not a radical organization demanding radical change. At certain moments of its history it closely followed the party line, without openly questioning policy, as most scholars have suggested. But by focusing only on these characteristics, women’s agency is hidden and moments when League members negotiated, challenged, and even resisted the group’s structure, goals, and party policy are overlooked. The three periods of the League’s history discussed in this chapter illustrate the complexity of both the organization’s relationship with the state and its internal dynamics. The League was not a static organization that always adhered to the party line, and its members were not passive individuals who strictly followed directives. Especially at these moments, members openly questioned and criticized the group’s ties to the party as well as the role of their organization in women’s lives and within the state. In these discussions, members simultaneously conveyed discontent with their group, disagreements with each other, and a desire to make the organization stronger for women. They engaged in lively, candid, and sometimes tense discussions about what they expected from the League and the state. The political climate in the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and again in the 1980s allowed

²¹⁶ Mojowska and Tycner, “Ruch kobiecey w ślepych zaułku?”

more openness within the League and beyond. Members were able and willing to challenge authority and to question openly their own forms of activism.²¹⁷ By allowing discontent to enter the pages of its publications and conference proceedings, the League participated in the unveiling of members' unease, indicating that it resisted. The above examples show the complexity of the relationship between the League and the party and further demonstrate the inaccuracy of portraying the organization, and especially its members, as only a tool of the party-state.

²¹⁷ Wolchik has argued that "the degree of influence which groups may exert on the political process in communist states depends on a number of factors," including the political climate. As a result, during the reform years of 1967 to 1969, the Union of Czechoslovak Women was able to accomplish more for women than in other periods. See Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," 290. In the same regard, the political climate during these periods of Polish history likewise allowed League members to be more open.

CONCLUSION

To understand communist-era organizations, we must look beyond their connections to party-states and incorporate analyses of how these groups functioned on the ground not only for the state but also for their constituents. As my project has shown, the relationship that the League of Women had to Poland's party-state and to women was complex and changing. Simultaneously, members followed the dictates of the party and central League administrations, questioned and resisted authority, implemented programs they deemed most important for women, determined how the League functioned, and defined their own personal levels of activism. At certain moments of its history, especially the stalinist era and 1966 to 1981, the organization underscored party propaganda, while at other instances, 1956 to 1966 and the 1980s in particular, it exhibited signs of resistance, independence, and tension.

The League served multiple, often conflicting, purposes. As all organizations functioning legally in Soviet bloc countries, it undoubtedly and not surprisingly was a party-affiliated group that served the state. Functioning under departments within the party, the League typically followed party directives, invited party leaders to its meetings and events, and promoted party policy in its publications and conferences. The organization often underscored women's roles as workers and/or mothers based on the needs of the state. The League advocated the 1946 rigged referendum and the elections that followed, and during the stalinist period, *przodownice społeczne* were instrumental in "enlightening" women through conversation about party policies, mostly dealing with the Six-Year Plan and peace campaigns. For some members, the League was a political organization that focused predominantly on promoting and educating women about politics. It also served as a stepping stone for some of its leaders to party committees and institutions. Finally, party officials had to approve presidents of the League's central and provincial administrations.

Looking beyond these visible connections to the party one can find a wide array of personal meanings and characteristics of the organization. Numerous members defined the League and their activism within it as apolitical and nonparty. In fact, a large percentage of members were not affiliated

with any party. The League was a charitable organization that provided various forms of assistance to women and children, such as finding daycare openings, aiding flood victims, distributing clothing and food to the poor, taking care of disabled persons, and providing counseling through its legal-social clinics. It was a self-help organization that offered personal assistance to its members. The group served as an educational institution that informed women not only about politically-laden propaganda but also about such issues as health care, child rearing, cooking, and employment through its Home Economics Committee as well as numerous lectures, seminars, and publications. As a social organization it gave women a female space in which to spend time together and relax in the absence of husbands, fathers, children, and employers. It offered entertainment, lectures, exhibits, and field trips. And, to a degree, some members espoused feminist ideas by not only promoting women's issues but also seeking to alter gender relations.¹ All of these League characteristics functioned simultaneously. Each member benefited from the organization in different ways, depending on their level of activism, their reasons for joining, and their expectations from participation. Some women not affiliated with the group also garnered benefits, particularly through the legal-social clinics, interventions on their behalf, and the Home Economics Committee.

The League's history raises the question of whether the group is an example or an anomaly in comparison to other women's organizations in Eastern Europe. Mass party-affiliated women's organizations, such as the League, functioned throughout the region and claimed to represent all women. In most countries, women decided whether or not they wanted to join and determined their levels of activism.² Women did not have to be party members to join. These groups served the state in various capacities, particularly through spreading propaganda among women, and they all struggled with reconciling women's double burden as producers and reproducers. The Hungarian Women's Democratic Association took on ideological-educational work among women and was "deeply involved in the implementation of unpopular policies," especially under stalinism.³ The Union of

¹ A few of the women I interviewed identify themselves as feminists without reservation. Others espouse feminist ideals but do not necessarily characterize themselves as feminists. And, a few do not see anything beneficial in feminism.

² In Bulgaria, all women over age twenty were automatically members. Franziska P. Hosken, comp., *International Directory of Women's Development Organizations* (Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, 1977), 31.

³ Joanna Goven, "The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-politics of Anti-feminism, 1948-1990" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 78.

Czechoslovak Women, which in 1950 became the sole women's group after the unification of the Slovak and Czech organizations, "clearly existed to mobilize women for the fulfillment of regime determined goals."⁴ The Union of Albanian Women "functioned as one of the party's most effective propagandistic wings,"⁵ and the National Women's Council in Romania promoted women's roles as producer and/or mother based on the interests of the state.⁶ The League's ties to the party-state, then, serve as an example of the relationships these groups had to individual regimes.

Other women's groups also experienced transformations in when, where, and if they functioned. In 1951, workplace chapters of the Hungarian Women's Democratic Association were disbanded, and in 1952/1953, discussions ensued regarding the possibility of dissolving the entire organization, but it remained intact.⁷ In 1955, the Association became part of the Patriotic People's Front, after which it was reestablished with a new name (the Hungarian Women's National Council) in 1957. In the mid-1960s, all local chapters were dissolved, leaving only the national administration.⁸ The Union of Czechoslovak Women was disbanded in 1952. It was determined that the "woman question" had been answered, there was no need for a separate and superfluous women's organization, and other party bodies and trade unions should take up work among women instead—similar to the official reasons given for the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel* in the Soviet Union twenty-two years earlier. Until 1967, the Union ceased to exist. A newly formed eighty- to one hundred- member Committee of Women was to represent women nationally and internationally, and local women's commissions, directly tied to various party bodies, were to conduct work among women locally. At the initiation of party elites working in the Committee of Women a mass women's organization was reestablished in

⁴ Sharon L. Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality: The Status of Women in Eastern Europe" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980), 312.

⁵ John Kosti, "From Courtyard to Cabinet: The Political Emergence of Albanian Women," in *Women, the State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sharon L. Wolchik and Alfred G. Meyer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 138-51, quotation on 144.

⁶ For a brief discussion of the National Women's Council, see Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 109-14.

⁷ Joanna Goven, personal correspondence with author, February 2001.

⁸ On these developments, see especially, Goven, "Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism," 189-199.

1967.⁹ The Anti-Fascist Front of Women in Yugoslavia was abolished in 1953 as well.¹⁰ And, in Romania in 1957, party leaders renamed the Democratic Women's Organization the National Women's Council and brought it under the direct control of the party's Central Committee.¹¹

The League's transformations in some ways resemble the changes made within these other women's organizations. The League twice—during the stalinist period and in 1966—was forced to disband its workplace chapters. And at least twice—in 1956 and in the early 1980s—discussions emerged regarding its importance and the possibility of its dissolution. The League, in contrast, however, was never entirely dissolved. I suspect that the Polish group may have had more independence from the party than organizations in other Eastern European countries, similar to the greater independence that Poland had from the Soviet Union.¹² When discussions of dissolution arose, members persistently argued that it was not yet time to abolish women's activism. Women's issues still needed to be addressed through such a forum. This independence, of course, was limited, as most clearly evidenced by the disbanding of workplace chapters in 1966.

It is difficult to assess how and to what degree other Eastern European women's organizations served women's needs, resisted policies, and defined their own forms of activism, since few scholars have made these questions central to their studies. In the case of the Hungarian Women's National Council, Joanna Goven has suggested (although, as she has stated, she has no evidence to prove it) that party officials dissolved the group in the late 1960s possibly because they saw it "as an inconvenience and an irritant as a result of its actually attempting to represent women's interests."¹³ From 1956 to 1966, I argue that the League did indeed attempt to represent working women's interests, making some party leaders "uncomfortable" and resulting in the dissolution of workplace chapters. Sharon Wolchik has argued that the Union of Czechoslovak Women defended women's interests between 1967 and

⁹ Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), chap. 5; and Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," 322-30.

¹⁰ Barbara Wolfe Jancar, "Neofeminism in Yugoslavia: A Closer Look," *Women and Politics* 8, no. 1 (1988): 1-30, esp. 15.

¹¹ Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity*, 109.

¹² Unlike in other countries in the region, in Poland, for example, collectivization was not enforced and the Catholic Church remained a powerful force throughout the period.

¹³ Goven, "Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism," 197-98.

1969, during a period of reform in Czechoslovakia.¹⁴ The goals that it set out focused on women's issues, including part-time work, equal pay for equal work, employment qualifications, investigations into pay inequity and advancement, and the ongoing tensions between women's reproductive and productive roles.¹⁵ The more open political climate allowed for this type of activism. The political climate in Poland in 1956 (through 1966) and in the 1980s also enabled League members to express their views more openly, call for "practical activism," and oppose party policies and the unequal treatment of women.

These brief comparisons among the various women's organizations suggest that the League was both an example of and an exception to how these groups functioned. It, like other women's groups, was affiliated with the party and promoted state interests. It changed locations of activism and its name. Its activism also depended on the general political climate in the country. In contrast to the other groups, the League was able to exist throughout the communist period due to, as I have speculated, its greater independence from the party. As a result, it more often may have exhibited opposition and promoted women's interests to a greater degree.

To the surprise of many, including some former members, the League continues to function in the postcommunist period, as do some of the other such women's organizations in the region, albeit under different political conditions.¹⁶ The *Český svaz žen* (Czech Women's Union), for example, has continued its activism and its programs resemble the League's.¹⁷ In Russia, the communist-era Soviet Women's Committee became the Union of Women of Russia,¹⁸ and in Belarusia, the Committee was

¹⁴ Wolchik, "Politics, Ideology, and Equality," 373-388.

¹⁵ Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women?* 114-15.

¹⁶ Danuta B., interview by author, Nowy Targ, 2 June 2000; and Marysia P., interview by author, Nowy Targ, 2 June 2000. These two former members were shocked when I informed them that the League had not been dissolved in 1989.

¹⁷ Following the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Czechoslovak Union of Women split into two organizations. Dasa Francikova, personal correspondence, May 2004; Sharon L. Wolchik, "Reproductive Policies in the Czech and Slovak Republics," in *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*, ed. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 58-91; and www.csz.cz. According to Éva Fodor, the Hungarian Women's National Council, in contrast, was disbanded. Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 130.

¹⁸ The Soviet Women's Committee was established following World War II. On the Committee, see Mary Buckley, "Adaptation of the Soviet Women's Committee: Deputies' Voices from 'Women of Russia,'" in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 157-85.

renamed the Belarusian Council of Women.¹⁹ In Bulgaria, the communist-era organization, Bulgarian Union of Women, became the Democratic Union of Women and continues to be linked to a political party—the Bulgarian Socialist Party.²⁰ The persistence of these groups demonstrates that the division of the communist and postcommunist eras is, as Mary Buckley has argued, false.²¹ Numerous organizations that had functioned under communism were able to redefine and reconceptualize their activism in the new political climates.

The League's, as well as these other women's organizations', continued activism shows that it was more than a party group, since it did not perish with the party.²² It also illustrates the importance of the organization to its members. During a time when anything linked to the communist period was being discredited, these women struggled to maintain and redefine their organization under notably different circumstances. As current president Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka has stated: members had lots of "determination and commitment" in keeping the organization alive during this difficult transformation. They "did not surrender."²³ Most members are older women who had been participants in the communist period, although some new and younger women have also joined.²⁴

Some remnants of the League's activism from the previous era remain. The Opole group, for example, continues to run a home economics center, through which they offer courses as well as cater events. In most of the twenty-two regional administrations (or centers) that continue to function, the League offers legal assistance and counseling through the volunteer efforts of attorneys. Some of these centers have provided assistance to disabled persons, impoverished children, flood victims, and single mothers. Local initiative is stronger than before, but the Central Administration continues to provide some directives. For some members, the League is a stepping stone into politics. Numerous members are in Poland's Parliament, and the current president co-founded a new party—*Unia pracy* (Work

¹⁹ Elena Gapova, personal correspondence, May 2004.

²⁰ Krassimira Daskalova, "Women's Problems, Women's Discourses in Bulgaria," in *Reproducing Gender*, 337-69.

²¹ Buckley, "Adaptation of the Soviet Women's Committee," 157.

²² As Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa stated, the League's current existence is proof that the organization was in fact needed and continues to be needed. Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, interview by author, Kraków, 9 June 2000.

²³ Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, interview by author, Warsaw, 7 March 2000.

²⁴ Bożena N., interview by author, Warsaw, 17 March 2000; and Jaruga-Nowacka, interview.

Union)—after her League activism led her to become more interested in political issues and women’s rights. The organization continues to be a female social space in which women come together to discuss various topics while enjoying tea, coffee, and pastries. The “all-ism” that some members criticized in 1956 continues to be a problem for some leaders. Jaruga-Nowacka and Bożena N., for example, would like the League to specialize in one issue, but it cannot, since in many locations it is the only women’s organization.²⁵ Some leaders continue to travel to other parts of the world to exchange ideas about women’s issues, but they are no longer limited to traveling to socialist countries. Irena Jaruga-Nowacka, for instance, traveled to England and Germany, and, with Bożena N., to China and the Czech Republic. The president of the League administration in Białe-Podlasie attended an international seminar in Helsinki. League administrations functioning near national borders often have visits to and from groups in neighboring countries. In Opole, for example, members often have exchanges with Slovak women’s groups and in Szczecin with German organizations.²⁶

Today’s organization also differs from the communist-era group in numerous ways. The League is significantly smaller, numbering approximately five thousand members. In the 1980s and especially after 1989, scores of members left the organization and most chapters were dissolved due largely to the unpopularity of anything that had once been linked to the communist party-state. The League no longer has small chapters, but rather centers or administrations in twenty-two locations. In 1989, it had forty-nine such centers.²⁷ As Jaruga-Nowacka has stated the members that remained, however, were the most active and “they know what they want. . . . I believe that 500,000 was a false number.”²⁸ Even with this much smaller number, it is one of the largest women’s organizations in Poland.

Women have other options. For the first time since the dissolution of women’s groups in the immediate postwar period, women could join or form their own independent groups.²⁹ In 1997, the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000; and Irena H., interview by author, Opole, 19 May 2000.

²⁷ Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

²⁸ Jaruga-Nowacka, interview. Bożena N. made similar claims. Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

²⁹ This is true throughout the region. Independent women’s organizations with a vast array of initiatives have formed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Center for the Advancement of Women in Poland included a total of ninety-four organizations, foundations, and science and research institutions that are related to women's interests/movement in its *Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland*. The groups listed include the League and the Circles Rural Housewives alongside a vast array of new groups and a few pre-1945 ones that have been reestablished.³⁰ Unlike most new organizations that cluster their activism in predominantly larger cities, the League has chapters throughout Poland. In many locations, it continues to be the sole women's organization. The new groups tend to function in academic circles among elite, educated women, while the League works with working women and housewives in the provinces.³¹

In the first few years of the transformation, these new women's groups discredited the League, often claiming "We do not want to have anything to do with the League." But once they recognized what the League's goals were, Jaruga-Nowacka maintained, cooperation emerged.³² According to Barbara Einhorn, in fact, "In most of these countries barring Poland, there has been either a refusal to countenance, or failed attempts to institute, cooperation between new autonomous women's groupings and these old-style women's organizations."³³ Cooperation began with the fight for reproductive rights, especially in 1989 and 1990, when the Polish government with the strong backing of the Catholic Church drafted antiabortion laws. League members, along with many other women activists, signed and distributed petitions, met with legislators, protested this move, and demanded a referendum (which they were denied).³⁴ In 1992, along with other organizations, the League formed the *Federacja na*

³⁰ Centrum Promocji Kobiet, *Directory of Women's Organizations and Initiatives in Poland* (Warsaw: Centrum Promocji Kobiet, 1997), 86-87.

³¹ Jaruga-Nowacka, interview.

³² Ibid.

³³ Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993), 187.

³⁴ Abortions are legal only in the case of rape and threat to a woman's life. The law stipulates that doctors who perform illegal abortions will be imprisoned for two years. On the abortion issue in Poland, see *ibid.*, chap. 3; Anna Matuchniak-Krasuska, "Czym była dyskusja o aborcji," in *Co to znaczy być kobietą w Polsce*, ed. Anna Titkow and Henryk Domański (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii, 1995), 189-212; and Eleonora Zielińska, "Between Ideology, Politics, and Common Sense: The Discourse of Reproductive Rights in Poland," in *Reproducing Gender*, 23-57. Elżbieta Łęcznarowiczowa, the president of the League during this transitional period, has stated that the goal was the same for these organizations, but the methods were different. While League members presented their arguments to Parliament, more radical and feminist organizations were more likely to demonstrate publicly. Łęcznarowiczowa, interview.

Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny (Federation for Women and Family Planning), a group that specifically deals with women's reproductive rights.

The League's financial situation is drastically different from the previous era. It lost thousands of dues-paying members, and it no longer publishes periodicals. More important, it does not receive any state funding or space in which to function. Most chapters have lost their office spaces, and for many this loss led to their dissolution. All but one (in Opole) now pay rent for their offices. As all organizations functioning in the postcommunist era, the League struggles to raise funds. Each chapter competes for grants, often from foreign organizations, typically for a specific project rather than general overhead. The Central Administration, for instance, received funds from the European Union to hold monthly seminars in various parts of Poland. These seminars included such topics as unemployment, human rights as women's rights, and domestic abuse. Fundraising has been more difficult for the League, claims Jaruga-Nowacka, because many sources stipulated that organizations had to be younger than three years and some refused outright to subsidize an organization that had been linked to the communist past.³⁵

The current League is an independent organization, whose members determine all of its agenda. No longer tied to a party-state, members focus solely on issues that they recognize as most important to women rather than those that the state advocates. The League seeks to protect and defend women's and family rights by underscoring sexual equality and partnership within families. It supports women in solving their everyday problems by, for example, assisting single mothers and poor families, addressing domestic abuse, and providing telephone hotlines. The organization stresses the need to educate women about their rights and encourages them to vote and run for office.³⁶ Probably the most important issue with which the group persistently contends is women's unemployment and equality in the workforce. Women generally are the last hired and first fired. They make up 62 percent of the unemployed, and even though they have higher education than men, they earn 30 percent less.³⁷ As

³⁵ Jaruga-Nowacka, interview.

³⁶ "Program działania Ligi Kobiet Polskich na lata 1995-1999 przyjęty na XI Krajowym Zjeździe," [22 May 1995], personal possession of Dorota Poretiatkowicz; "XII Krajowy Zjazd Ligi Kobiet Polskich: Program działania LKP na lata 1999-2003," 1999, in possession of the Central Administration; "Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Kobiet Polskich od 25 lutego 1995r. do 22 maja 1999r.," 1999, in possession of the Central Administration; and www.ligakobietpolskich.pl.

³⁷ Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka, "Zmiana sytuacji kobiet po 1989 roku—poprawa czy pogorszenie?" in *Polskie oblicza feminizmu: Materiały z konferencji "Polskie oblicza feminizmu" Uniwersytet*

both Jaruga-Nowacka and Bożena N. have stated, young women experience difficulty in obtaining jobs because employers assume that they will get married, have children, take maternity leave, and stay home to take care of sick children, and women who are over thirty-five are seen as too old.³⁸ Accepted traditional gender roles have affected women's employment opportunities. Women now deliberately have to fight for these rights that largely had been assumed as unquestionable during the previous era, although most in reality were never achieved.

Communist-era organizations should not be discredited today simply because they functioned during that era nor should their previous activism be discredited as doing little for women. When examining such groups, we should judge them based not only on their connections to the party-states in which they functioned but also on their specific merits and activism. Moving beyond the totalitarian model of Eastern European history, this study has shown one example of the complexity of the communist period. To gain a better understanding of how socialism functioned on the ground, historical accounts should continue to depict the multiple, often contradictory, layers of communism.

Warszawski 8 marca 1999, ed. Weronika Chańska and Danuta Ulicka (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2000), 53-57.

³⁸ Jaruga-Nowacka, interview; and Bożena N., interview, 17 March 2000.

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