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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

National group helps stimulate
interest in vital public issues

Voter registration, a prominent activity of the League of Women Voters, is conducted in Honolulu, Hawaii, by Mrs. Ernest Harris (center) and Mrs. George Regula (r.) to sign up University of Hawaii student Kay Unten outside League's versatile "Voteswagons."



LADY! Does your husband know what you're doing?" The question put to Mrs. Doris E. Pritchett of Camden, N. J., two years ago came from an angry man in the audience at a state convention of the League of Women Voters. She had been arguing for a state income tax to finance more and better schools, colleges, mental health facilities and prisons. But her anti-tax opponent told her she should have stayed at home because that, for him, was "a woman's place." "I was so surprised that I burst into giggles," Mrs. Pritchett recalls, "and fortunately the audience laughed along with me. When the laughter subsided, I told him: 'I really do not have to answer that question, but . . . yes, my husband knows and approves.'"

A similar response would probably come from almost any one of the 146,000 members of the League of Women Voters scattered in 1,227 communities across the nation. Organized in 1920 when women finally gained the right to vote, the League offers speakers and panels on government issues to any organization without cost. It holds candidates meetings where citizens can see and question all candidates for political election. It also distributes "Voter Information Sheets" containing biographical information on all candidates and their views on important public issues. In short, the League helps to bridge the information gap between governors and the governed, thus promoting individual effectiveness and dispelling the notion that "you can't fight city hall."

"I joined the League in 1953 after having voted on a public question about which I had no knowledge," Mrs. Pritchett recalls. "I realized that I was abusing a privilege for which many Negroes were being persecuted and even killed. I felt that since it was so easy for me to exercise my voting right, the least I could do was to become an informed voter and cast an intelligent ballot."

Adds Mrs. Gloria Marquez, board member of the Pound Ridge, N. Y., League: "If Negro women join in meaningful numbers, they can play an important role in bettering conditions for all Negroes through their League work. They can also help white members of the League to more clearly understand Negro problems."

Because the League spends much of its time gathering facts on public issues and inching laboriously toward consensus after long and sometimes involved discussion, it has a reputation of being "terribly intellectual and bookish" and therefore unappealing to the very women who need it most. Actually, the League acts as well as thinks. It testifies at public hearings, button-holes public officials and gets its point of view disseminated through the mass media. Thus, for example, the League supported a recent 10-month voter registration drive in New Orleans—vice chaired by Mrs. Sybil Morial—which added more than 25,000 new voters to the rolls. About 90 per cent of the newly-franchised voters were Negro.

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Chicago League members see for themselves a condemned, South Side slum building which, according to law, should be boarded up. Such "go-see-trips" often spark civic reforms. The League is nonpartisan, but all League members are encouraged to involve themselves in partisan political activities in the interests of good citizenship.

LEAGUERS APPLY EXPERIENCES IN OTHER CIVIC AREAS

NEGRO WOMEN are members of the League of Women Voters for various reasons. Mrs. Anna Johnston Diggs, wife of Michigan Congressman Charles C. Diggs Jr., became a Leaguer to learn more about Detroit and gain a "genuine understanding of much-discussed state and local issues." Others joined either because of "housewife fatigue," a desire for meaningful contacts across racial and political lines, a concern about a particular issue or, in general, a wish to learn. Mrs. Elizabeth H. Gilmore explains that she joined the Charleston, W. Va., League in 1958 because "at the time there were no Negro members and I am full of pioneer blood and I was vitally interested in constitutional revision for West Virginia."

Often outsiders are invited into the League by personal friends or neighbors. But the membership chairman of the Washington, D. C., League, Mrs. Louise Perry, points out: "Some women have the misconception that this is an invitation-only group. Actually, anybody who is interested is free to join, and if women get actively involved in an issue, chances are the 'League bug' will get them."

One issue which has excited members of the Washington League for several years has been the question of home rule for local citizens. "I have a hard time persuading my friends to join the League," re-

ports Dorothy Height, who in addition to her League membership is president of the National Council of Negro Women. "They can't see how working for a new state constitution, for instance, has much to do with the solution of their present problems."

But not only do Leaguers see the relationship, many of them discover a reciprocity between their membership and other civic activities. They are often selected for community boards and various governmental commissions. In Gary, Ind., Mrs. Inez B. Brewer, a high school art teacher and president of the local League, has served as art director, has headed its extensive Know-your-local-government study and illustrated the booklet which resulted. Indianapolis Leaguer, Mrs. Fay Williams, is also director of a War-on-Poverty neighborhood center, as is Mrs. Hettie L. Mills of Jacksonville, Fla. Mrs. Deborah McCrea of Providence, R. I., feels the knowledge she has gained as a member of the Human Resources Committee of the local League has contributed to her work on the Providence War-On-Poverty board. Mrs. Frankie Freeman, former board member of the St. Louis League, serves on the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights while Mrs. Helen Lemme, a veteran member of the Iowa City League and its former president, is active with the Governor's Human Rights Commission.



Ex-board member of the National League, Mrs. John A. Campbell (l.), works at its Washington, D. C., headquarters as chairman of its Education Fund, is a colleague of Mrs. Jehu Hunter (r.) who was president of Washington League during 1963-65.



Ex-chairman of the United Nations Committee in the League of Pound Ridge, N. Y., Mrs. Gloria Marquez was responsible for making "the UN's work and principles more meaningful and comprehensible to local citizens," found work rewarding.



Robert C. Weaver, secretary of housing and urban affairs, is enthusiastically applauded by Mrs. Robert J. Stuart, national president of the League, after he delivered an address to the League at its recent national convention in Denver, Colorado.



Delegates to national convention from the Washington, D. C., League included (l. to r.) Mmes. Louise Perry, Ann L. Macaluso, Lacy Hoover, Connie Fortune, and Betty Braderman. National program is selected by League's biennial convention.



Atty. Phyllis Shearer (r.) of Greenburgh, N. Y., League discusses group's publication with Mrs. Carol Allensworth. Mrs. Shearer says: "Our local League has taken a leadership role in moving the town toward more comprehensive master planning."



Augusta, Ga., League includes (l. to r.) Mmes. E. Clifford Easter, Donald Bidus, Stephen Matthews and Allen Brown who is chairman of the State Educational Committee. Many citizens rely on League as source of unbiased, political information.

LEAGUE SPOUSES 'TOLERANT'

ALTHOUGH most members of the League of Women Voters are married, they generally find their work does not interfere unduly with home life.

The attitudes of their husbands, lovingly dubbed "League widowers," range from "enthusiastic" to "tolerant," and often the wife's civic interests seem to rub off on her spouse. Thus, the husband of Mrs. Vera W. Davis of Jacksonville, Fla., enjoys the League as much as she does. William Davis of Anderson, Ind., "does not mind preparing the meals and doing the cleaning, if I am happy with my League work," says his wife Sadye, a former board member.

Mrs. Doris E. Pritchett of Camden, N. J., recalls: "Someone asked my husband, 'Are you any relation to that simple woman who goes around talking about an income tax for New Jersey?' Joey replied: 'No, I'm not related to her. I'm just crazy enough to be married to her.'"

In Flint, Mich., Mrs. J. Merrill Spencer's husband is so proud of his wife's League activities that for some time he refused outside political obligations for himself so that she could remain on the League board. Mrs. Anne Cheek Scott of Charleston, W. Va., says her husband "is happy to hear me able to discuss something other than 'what the children did today' (they have seven). Really, he is delighted and drives me to meetings when necessary and helps me at all times." Says Richard Blackwell of Chicago Heights, Ill.: "There ought to be a League of Men Voters."



Camden, N. J., League member, Mrs. Doris E. Pritchett, says a TV newsman who interviewed her admitted "he had always thought of the League as a group of wealthy women with nothing worthwhile to do; and meeting me had changed his entire concept."



Mrs. Ruth Hendricks, a member of the Hempstead, N. Y., League, talks with a neighbor, Mrs. Inez Bigby, about the importance of voting. The League is a non-profit, volunteer organization. No salaries are paid to its officers or its directors.

LEAGUE PLUGS EQUALITY

WHEN the League of Women Voters was organized in 1920, it pushed such modest programs as teaching women simple voting procedures—how to register, where to vote, how to mark a ballot, etc. It later concentrated on problems related to the needs of women and children—better education, reduction of the prevailing 72-hour work week, an end to child labor, the lowering of infant mortality rates, better sanitation and the right to service on juries. Today the League's program has been so expanded that it supports, for example, policies and programs which provide equality of educational and employment opportunities for all persons.

The League was the first national, non-partisan organization to promote a registration and get-out-the-vote campaign. It pioneered in providing impartial information on candidates in local, state and national elections. It has a continuing interest in foreign policy issues and has strived to build public support for the United Nations. In Charlotte, N.C., for example, Mrs. Dorothy Rutledge Crawford heads the local League's United Nations Committee. She and former U.N. Committee Chairman Mrs. Eva L. Nixon of Tarrytown, N. Y., have helped generate community interest in the work of the U.N.



League member since 1948, Mrs. Dora Needham Lee, 85, a New York widow, was a Suffragette 46 years ago, was featured in a 1960 article in the Long Island Press she is holding. A newsman told Mrs. Lee he wanted to interview her in 1970 on the 50th anniversary of woman suffrage.