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## Flash in the Pan: Cross-Class Cooperation in 1916 Iron Range Strike

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## Flash in the Pan: Gender and Cross-Class Cooperation in the 1916 Iron Range Strike

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Rutgers University

In the summer of 1916, forty miners at the St. James iron pit in Aurora, Minnesota set down their tools and marched with their families across the Mesabi Iron Range.<sup>2</sup> Wives picketed alongside their husbands, pushing their children in buggies and waving banners protesting low wages and the contract pay system.<sup>3</sup> It was the region's second strike in less than ten years and proved to be one of the most violent and deadly.<sup>4</sup>

For the last half-century, our historical understanding of this strike has been almost exclusively confined to the role of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies). The general narrative has described how unorganized miners on the Range turned to the IWW during a three-month strike that ended in short-lived reforms.<sup>5</sup> Such a narrative is quite apropos for this

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at *Retrospection and Respect: 1913-14 Copper Miners' Strike Symposium* (April 2014). Working Paper: Please do not cite or quote without the author's permission. Readers may contact the author at ryan.tate@rutgers.edu

<sup>2</sup> The Minnesota Iron Range stretches across northeastern Minnesota, comprised of the Mesabi, Cuyuna, and Vermilion Ranges. "The Range" was fertile field for labor organizing, especially the Mesabi Range, where much of the strife occurred. See Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917*, Vol. IV (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 494.

<sup>4</sup> These strikers followed the lead of an Italian immigrant, Joe Greeni, who emerged from a day's work underground at the St. James pit in Aurora to find his paycheck for much less than he expected. Greeni first initiated the walkout. The region's press had predicted such an event as early as April. Though US Steel reported record profits from overseas wartime mobilization, wages remained stagnant. See Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 494. For a debate among contemporaries about the contract system, see Mary Heaton Vorse and Tyler Dennet, "The Mining Strike in Minnesota: I-From the Miners Point of View, II- The Other Side." *The Outlook* 63 (August 1916): 1045, 1048.

<sup>5</sup> The following offers the most complete historiography of the strike: Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), Chapter 13; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, Vol. IV; Joseph R. Conlin ed. *At the Point of Production: The Local History of the I.W.W.* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981); Arundel Cotter, *The Authentic History of the United States Steel Corporation* (New York: Moody Magazine and Book Co., 1916); Patricia Kay Gladchild, "Industrial Workers of the World: Factors Contributing to Widespread Worker Participation," Masters thesis (University of Minnesota, 1994); Ronald George Lillie, "The Industrial Workers of the World and the Strike of the Iron Ore Miners of Minnesota in 1916," Graduate research paper (Bemidji State University, 1976); Robert M. Eleff, "The 1916 Minnesota Miners' Strike Against U.S. Steel," *Minnesota History* 51.2 (Summer 1988), 63-74; Neil Bettern, "Riot, Revolution, Repression in the Iron Range Strike of 1916," *Minnesota History*, 41, 2 (Summer, 1968), 82-94; George West, "The

setting—at a conference mindful of the memory of Michigan’s Copper Miners’ Strike of 1913. After all, these Minnesota miners had turned to the IWW, in part, because the Western Federation of Miners had expressed little interest in returning to the region after earlier struggles in Michigan’s Copper County.<sup>6</sup>

Yet this overreliance on the role of the IWW has limited our full vision of the vicissitudes of the episode. In what follows, I broaden our narrative by turning to the gendered nature of the strike. As I will show, the plight of abused women provided the necessary language to build and influence early organizing efforts. Responding to voices of alarm, three women formed a cross-class alliance on the Range that summer. Though their efforts were short-lived and did not necessarily meet success, their stories contour the existing narratives of the sometimes fragile and transitory place of women in the labor movement. To finish, allow me to offer preliminary thoughts on how contingent developments in the social reform movement made such cross-class alliances more difficult to launch in subsequent years. Let me say at the outset that it is my intention that this paper serves as both an argument and as an invitation to discuss and weigh-in on similar initiatives.

### Mesabi: A Cross-Class Tale

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Mesaba Range Strike,” *The New Republic*, 8, 96 (September 2, 1916); Mary Heaton Vorse, “The Mining Strike in Minnesota Iron-From the Miners’ Point of View,” *The Outlook*, 113, 18 (August 30, 1916), 1036-1048; Ryan M. Tate, “A House Divided: Women’s Activism in the Minnesota Labor Movement, 1900-1935” *Proceedings of the National Conference on Undergraduate Research* (Ashville: University of North Carolina, 2012): 1098-1106.

<sup>6</sup> See Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 493; Note also that the IWW was of particular strength in Minnesota’s northern ranges and lumberyards around the same period that the Nonpartisan League (NPL) migrated from North Dakota into St. Paul politics. The NPL’s radical activities aggravated conservative hostility and antipathies. This hostility correlated with the development of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, which launched statewide investigations into the loyalty of fringe groups, particularly the IWW and NPL. See Carl H. Chrislock, *Watchdog of Loyalty: The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety During World War I* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991), 144-82; Michel Beaud. *Histoire du Capitalisme 1500-1980* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981), 153.

For many women on the Range, more was at stake in 1916 than their husbands' wage grievances. There was more to their banners than "Cost of Living Going Up, Wages Must Also" and "Higher Wages, Eight Hours and Abolishment of Contract Labor."<sup>7</sup> There were more reasons to parade seventy-five miles through northern iron country in a sweltering heat nearing 90 degrees.

The contract system, as used on the Mesabi Range, obligated their male family members to mine iron ore for a specified price per carload. Miners regularly complained that graft, favoritism, and quid-pro-quo were persistent problems.<sup>8</sup> The terms of carload prices were open to fluctuations depending on "conditions." It was not unknown for supervisors to willingly raise car prices in certain areas, and thus the incomes of whomever mined there, in exchange for gifting. Among the countless "drinks and cigars" heaped upon captains by some miners, other workers accused their supervisors of bribery and more rascally requests, such as pursuing the "virtue" of their wives and daughters in exchange for preferable locations.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps it comes at little surprise that women facing prospects of violation, whether real or imagined, helped propagate the work-stoppage message that effectively closed several mines within a number of days. Yet these women marched in a conflict-ridden and dangerous setting. In the absence of immigrant strikebreakers, mine owners sought to bring a quick end to the walkout. They sent deputized guards to challenge those on the picket lines.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 494, 507.

<sup>8</sup> Relying on weights and measures, mine officials argued, was a must when they were unable to directly supervise underground laborers.

<sup>9</sup> Mine officials, though cognizant of the problem, were without much sympathy, telling miners that if they would merely come forward, they could investigate and reprimand such offenders. "The Mining Strike in Minnesota: I-From the Miners Point of View, II- The Other Side." *The Outlook* 63 (August 1916): 1045, 1048.

<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Eleff, "The 1916 Minnesota Miners' Strike Against U.S. Steel," *Minnesota History* 51.2 (Summer 1988): 63-74; Marion B. Cothren, "When Strike-Breakers Strike," *Survey* 36 (August 26, 1916): 535; Vorse and Dennet, "The Mining Strike," 1045.

It did not take long before several reports surfaced of violent and disquieting interchanges between working-class women and employer security. On one occasion mine deputies yanked a young Finnish girl over railroad ties, bloodied her on the tracks, and tumbled her injured frame into a nearby ditch. By the time she made her way to the local hospital, many other women had their own distressing accounts to relate.<sup>11</sup>

The particularities of this violence established the historical conditions necessary for the cross-class cooperation that lies at the heart of this paper. News of duress first reached the IWW headquarters in Chicago. Leader Big Bill Haywood responded to requests to send “more speakers and organizers immediately” by dispatching several members, including Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Flynn was well known upon her arrival on the Range. She had first visited the region for a speaking tour in 1907. That year she travelled through, as she put it, “bleak and primitive towns” that were striking for higher wages against the Oliver Iron Mining Company, a subsidiary of the nation’s first billion-dollar company, United States Steel. Then seventeen, Flynn was already an established speaker, with a reputation for “inflammatory” oratory according to news accounts.<sup>12</sup> On the Range, she even met her first husband, an ore miner, Jack Jones.<sup>13</sup>

1916 marked her return. On the day she arrived in town, the Duluth *Labor World* proudly reported that she was the “most feared woman in whole of the corporation world.” Posters lined the streets signed by Haywood triumphing a “Declaration of War.” Others in the press were less

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<sup>11</sup> “Say Women on the Ranges Are ‘Game’: Members of the Women’s Welfare League of St. Paul Hear Deputies Cause Strife” *Duluth News Tribune* (September 16, 1916); Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 502.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *Rebel Girl: An Autobiography, My First Life 1906-1926* (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 85.

<sup>13</sup> Jones was later arrested for attempting to dynamite a mine captain’s residence in Aurora: “Law Breaks in on Honeymoon of Girl Orator” wrote the *New York World*. Their relationship ended shortly thereafter. Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 84-5.

enthused. The *Duluth News Tribune*, on hearing she was en route wrote, “Elizabeth Flynn Arrives to Stir Up Strife.”<sup>14</sup>

Just days after her arrival, Flynn left town once more. She began a speaking tour of the Twin Cities to bolster support and raise funds. In response to her organizing efforts, Lenora Austin Hamlin, an upper-middle class reformer and the president of the St. Paul Civic and Welfare Club, headed to northern Minnesota to support those women who had been battered and abused on the picket line in support of their families’ labor efforts.<sup>15</sup>

Austin Hamlin was the everywoman of social reform. She was a well-heeled and well-connected clubwoman and advocate for women’s rights. She was the privileged daughter of Minnesota’s Sixth Governor, the even-tempered Horace Austin, and the wife of Conde Hamlin, a former managing editor and vice-president of the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*. She was also among the Cities’ leading suffragists, once active in establishing the Women’s Building at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago.<sup>16</sup>

Like many upper-middle class reformers of the period, Austin Hamlin’s association with social reform had grown from a mid-Victorian emphasis on charitable activities and benevolence.<sup>17</sup> General historical scenarios have depicted women’s perceived domestic moral superiority and religious revivalism as their early paths to the “public sphere.”<sup>18</sup> Middle-class women, like Austin Hamlin, were encouraged to apply their time and resources to social

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<sup>14</sup> As qtd. in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 506; Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 208-9.

<sup>15</sup> “Say Women on the Ranges Are ‘Game’: Members of the Women’s Welfare League of St. Paul Hear Deputies Cause Strife” *Duluth News Tribune* (September 16, 1916); Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 84-6.

<sup>16</sup> According to her descendants, Austin Hamlin “considered [the Women’s Building] her greatest achievement in the battle for women’s rights.” See Corrine Conde, Letter to the Editor: “Women’s Work,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1967), 8; see also Ronald Walton, *Women in Social Work* (London: Routledge, 1975) and Jill Bergman and Debra Bernardi, eds., *Our Sisters’ Keepers: Nineteenth-Century Benevolence Literature by American Women* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984): 19.

problems, but—realizing the limitations of the model—began to turn toward social and political rights as well.<sup>19</sup>

These women based their female-led clubs, associations and agencies around social ills. Some focused on public health and morality. Others, like Austin Hamlin, merged with the suffrage movement. Like the Iron Range wives who took to picket lines on behalf of their husbands, Austin Hamlin also displayed a keen inclination for labor reform. She recognized the economic roots of many social hardships, and supported some labor efforts to alleviate societal conditions.

Agreeing to support the IWW, Austin Hamlin travelled with Flynn to the small northeastern town of Crosby. Upon their arrival it became clear that the two were unwelcomed visitors. After settling into their room, Flynn found a note slipped under the hotel door. It was anonymous. But in its scrawled threat of bodily harm and promise of heinous delivery, it typified the mood on the Range. It was a note designed to shatter her loyalties and press her out of town. There was little ambivalence about that.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly afterward the sheriff and his deputies entered the hotel lobby and summoned a private meeting. When the sheriff met Flynn, he spoke, as she put it, “very belligerently.” He told her that if she “had come to make trouble, he would arrest her forthwith.” It was not the first or last time Elizabeth Gurley Flynn felt herself cornered.<sup>21</sup>

Of all the prominent social reformers who Flynn recruited to the cause, Austin Hamlin proved the most valuable. Austin Hamlin informed the sheriff of her family connections. She also warned that she been “delegated by a group of women’s clubs” in the Twin Cities to see that Flynn was not assaulted as other women had been. She insisted upon Flynn’s right to speak and

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<sup>19</sup> Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 208-09.

<sup>21</sup> Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 208-09.

stressed that no harm should come to her. To be sure, the sheriff's treatment of the women grew more cordial. As Flynn put it sometime later, the sheriff "quieted down very quickly and was quite apologetic."<sup>22</sup>

Particular to the worry that brought Austin Hamlin and Flynn together was the plight of Mikla Masonovich, a Montenegrin immigrant. Masonovich, a poor miner's wife, had arrived in the country, and on the Range, in 1907. Her husband had actually been an immigrant strikebreaker in an earlier conflict over similar complaints. Flynn described Masonovich as "a particularly pathetic and appealing figure, a young and beautiful Montenegrin woman, mother of five children, one a nursing baby."<sup>23</sup>

On the day before the Fourth of July, Masonovich had gained statewide attention after her arrest for first-degree murder. According to reports in the press and the Grand Jury account, company guards, deputized by Sheriff Meining, had entered Masonovich's family home in Biwabik on the eastern edge of the Range. They sought to arrest her striking husband and one of their household borders for the operation of a "blind pig" (or speakeasy), which was illegal in the dry county.<sup>24</sup> Unable like many eastern Europeans in the region to read or write in English, Masonovich and her husband had an apparent misunderstanding with one deputy. A scuffle ensued. Masonovich described the inception of the conflict: the deputy "got hold of me and threw me into the bedroom onto my baby...I spit blood for three days after that."<sup>25</sup>

Several boarders in the Masonovich household, who were also miners, retaliated on her behalf. Soon the sound of gunfire pitched a discord in a quiet community. No one is sure who

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<sup>22</sup> Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 211.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "Minnesota Trials," *The Masses* (January, 1917).

<sup>24</sup> Otio Christensen, "Invading Miners' Homes," *International Socialist Review* 17 (September, 1916); 161-162; Douglas Ollila Jr., "Ethnic Radicalism and the 1916 Mesabi Strike." *Range History* 3.4 (Winter 1978).

<sup>25</sup> Christensen, "Invading Miners' Homes," *International Socialist Review* 17 (1916), 161- 162; US Bureau of the Census, *14th Census of the United States, 1920*. Vol. 3, *Reports by States* (Washington D.C.: 1923).



fired the shots, but James C. Myron, a deputized mine guard from Duluth, and Thomas Ladvalla, an innocent bystander and soda-pop deliverer, fell slain in front of the family's home.<sup>26</sup>

Police arrested all the occupants of the house, including Masonovich, her husband and three striking boarders. Evidence was weak in the case, with some sources suggesting that the gunfire had been from outside the home, and that the miners and Masonovich were innocent.<sup>27</sup> In the course of her trial, Masonovich who spoke little English, did not understand the proceedings, looked "frightened and bewildered" and clung "frantically to her children."<sup>28</sup>

Austin Hamlin's class status and connections could not be understated. As a well-connected reformer from St. Paul, she added legitimacy to the efforts of an out-of-state organizer like Flynn.<sup>29</sup> During the proceedings, Austin Hamlin's reports to civic and social agencies across the Twin Cities related the struggles of Masonovich and other women who been subjected to harassment by "gun toting" deputies acting under a shroud of "stupidity."<sup>30</sup> She leveraged her position to pull strings and secure the release of Masonovich for a "nominal amount of bail."<sup>31</sup>

This only added to the growing cross-class alliance between the strikers and several mayors and businessmen on the Range. In the midst of intensifying violence—particularly the case of Masonovich—elected officials, businessmen, and strikers came together to discuss the strike conditions at a public meeting. As strikers stood one by one to stress the reasonableness of their demands, many business leaders and public officials began to sympathize with their cause. One local businessman from Hibbing, himself a former immigrant laborer, expressed sincere support. He told the strikers that he believed every laborer should "have sufficient money to

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<sup>26</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 506.

<sup>27</sup> Christensen, "Invading Miners' Homes," 162; Eleff, "The 1916 Minnesota Miners' Strike," 71.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "Minnesota Trials," *The Masses* (January, 1917).

<sup>29</sup> Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 208, 211.

<sup>30</sup> "Say Women on the Ranges Are 'Game': Members of the Women's Welfare League of St. Paul Hear Deputies Cause Strife" *Duluth News Tribune* (September 16, 1916).

<sup>31</sup> Flynn, *Rebel Girl*, 208-09.

clothe his family well, so he can feed them, so he can educate the children, and so he can have a comfortable home, and sufficient to save for his old age.”<sup>32</sup> Public officials soon began efforts to bring the company to the bargaining table, even sending telegrams to William Wilson, the U.S. Secretary of Labor.<sup>33</sup>

This cross-class cooperation between Austin Hamlin, an upper-middle class woman; Flynn, a radical reformer; and Masonovich, a working-class immigrant, was built on resistance to violence against women. This raises questions not only about the gendered nature of early organizing efforts, but also how such cross-class alliances could emerge and dissolve. Let us consider: Why did these united efforts in 1916 prove to be a ‘flash in the pan’? I do not wish to suggest cross-class alliances were normative. This was a historically conditioned moment. Its circumstances did not transverse historical times and places. But since no larger or enduring organizational or activist effort emerged in the wake of this strike with comparable impulses, let us briefly ruminate on “why.”

#### Some Thoughts on an Alliance Short-Lived

Certainly, the fleeting and transitory nature of the strike itself made it difficult to endure these organized efforts in its wake. As far as the historical records show, these women had no further contact once the strike ended with loss that September and Flynn bid her final farewell at the Socialist Opera House in Virginia, Minnesota in December.<sup>34</sup>

After all, each of these women was in an ambivalent position. As their backgrounds allude, the their alliance was always precarious. Consider Flynn as an example. When the IWW

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<sup>32</sup> As qtd. in Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (1969 reprint, Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 190.

<sup>33</sup> Dubofsky, *We Shall Be*, 190.

<sup>34</sup> Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 517.

returned to the Iron Range to organize lumber workers—just ten days after the end of the Mesabi strike—Flynn was not among them. In fact, her relations with IWW leader Big Bill Haywood had been irrevocably strained. The two had disagreed on how to handle the legal case and plea-bargain of Masonovich’s husband, his fellow strikers, and IWW organizers.<sup>35</sup> Flynn embarked on a career with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and did not return to Minnesota in any official capacity in the near future.<sup>36</sup>

But their personal stories were not entirely responsible for the lapse of cooperation between disparate women sympathetic to labor reform. In the aftermath of the strike, a number of circumstances converged to strain the alliance of similarly diverse groups of women. Principal among these were the substantial changes in the reform movement itself. Austin Hamlin’s personal and professional connections proved useful to free Masonovich on bail and to partially sanction the efforts of Flynn in the eyes of the law. But such connections proved limiting as her reform organizations experienced professionalization and bureaucratization in following years.

By 1919, all interactions between social reformers and labor and radical groups in Minneapolis and St. Paul, particularly those running through social agencies, became extremely limited. This was partially a result of the functioning of the Community Fund, which city officials organized in 1919 to raise and allocate money among local civic agencies. Its impact was twofold: it freed agency boards from being solely responsible for financing services (as was

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<sup>35</sup> Flynn had accepted an arrangement for the three miners, none of whom spoke English fluently, to spend time in prison. There was a misunderstanding regarding the sentencing. Haywood believed that the men had been sentenced for five to 20 years, although the sentence was really an intermediate time up to 20 years with the eligibility for parole at the end of the year. Haywood held Flynn responsible for allowing the miners to plead guilty to charges that they may have poorly understood as immigrants. Flynn’s role in advising these miners, as Haywood put it, “terminated” her “connection with the IWW.” According to Peter Carlson, Haywood’s biographer, Flynn “remained in the union, but took pains to avoid Haywood and his supporters.” See footnote in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 517; Bill Haywood, *The Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood*, (International Publishers, 1929), 291-2; Peter Carlson, *Roughneck, The Life And Times of Big Bill Haywood*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 237.

<sup>36</sup> See Flynn’s autobiography, *Rebel Girl*.

the case at Chicago's Hull House) and it gave an outside and centralized agency a degree of decision power over organizational activities. As such, in the Twin Cities, civic agencies were not financially responsible for their organization's viability, but were also expected to ensure that their activities would not jeopardize funding.<sup>37</sup>

Elite contributors largely controlled the fund, and many business donors looked unfavorably at close relations with labor and radical groups. In fact, many contributors to the fund were those responsible for the open shop policy in the city.<sup>38</sup> Austin Hamlin's familial connections to monied elites in St. Paul became much more difficult to overlook. New funding patterns challenged many reformers like her to alter their public statements.

Consider Robbins Gilman. Gilman, the Head Resident of the Minneapolis North East Neighborhood House, was openly pro-union prior to the fund's influence. But he kept his beliefs private to suit Community Fund demands. As the Head Resident of the University Settlement in New York, Gilman had offered the settlement's halls and rooms to strikers' meetings, and even provided striking girls with lunches.<sup>39</sup> When he first began working in Minneapolis, Gilman had turned the settlement from one that focused on child-oriented services to one that helped women find and secure employment.<sup>40</sup> But after recognizing the Community Fund's disapproval of labor, he no longer used the facilities as a strike refuge. In one correspondence, he could not remember whether the settlement had "any definite connection with Union Labor in any way," and noted that while he personally "would be very glad to [accommodate] any local group of Union members provided we had rooms" he was powerless to offer such services unless he received

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<sup>37</sup> Judith Ann Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 50; "A Settlement Board—its Functions, Selection, Composition and Various Relationships," June 1939, North East Neighborhood House Papers, box 29, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>38</sup> Trolander, *Settlement Houses*, 60; Michiko Hase, "Phyllis Wheatley House of Minneapolis, 1924-1937" (Unpublished paper, 1987), 3. Available at the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>39</sup> Hase, "Phyllis Wheatley House of Minneapolis," 2,3.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Ann Hoff, "A Neighborhood Horizon" (Minneapolis: Unpublished, 193?), 5. Available at Minnesota Historical Society.

“assurances not only from my board but from the Community Fund that allowing Unions to meet here would be an acceptable policy.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, Gilman avoided publically cooperating with organized labor. When the American Association of Social Workers sponsored discussions on labor relations, Gilman, who had been invited, did not attend, but sent two part-time workers in his place, both of whom missed roughly half the meetings.<sup>42</sup>

As the efforts of Austin Hamlin on the Iron Range attests, labor and social reform movements were much more common prior to the establishment of the Fund in 1919. In 1909, the Secretary of the Associated Charities of Minneapolis had called for the unity of charity workers and unions.<sup>43</sup> Agnes Peterson, the head of the Women and Children's Bureau of the Minnesota Department of Labor had even urged “club women to mould public opinion on the needs of their sisters in industry,”<sup>44</sup> That same year a speaker from Chicago, Raymond Robbins, gave a speech at the Pillsbury Settlement House about the necessity of male union organization, particularly in the wake of the strike at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania.<sup>45</sup> On another occasion, the Pillsbury House hosted Scandinavian speakers arguing for the harmony of socialism and the Bible, an event a conservative Community Fund would have likely rejected.<sup>46</sup>

Cross-class alliance between women like Hamlin and Flynn proved all the more difficult as the Community Fund wielded greater clout as they years went by. The Phyllis Wheatley House in Minneapolis, as an example, garnered attention for having close ties with labor unions

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<sup>41</sup> Robbins Gilman to Lee Sharp, South Side Neighborhood House, Minneapolis, 30 Sept. 1937, North East Neighborhood House Papers, box 29, Minnesota Historical Society; Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*, 108.

<sup>42</sup> Norma Moe to Lee sharp, Twin Cities Federation of Settlements, 26, November 1937, North East Neighborhood House Paper, box 29, Minnesota Historical Society; Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*, 112.

<sup>43</sup> “Unity His Theme: E.T. Lies for Application [sic] of Charity Workers and Unions” *Minneapolis Labor Review* (October 28, 1909).

<sup>44</sup> Blanche McDonald, “Five Minnesota Women on Biennial Program on Labor Conditions” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (June 17, 1914).

<sup>45</sup> “Organization Is the Thing” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (September 14, 1909), 6.

<sup>46</sup> “Socialism and the Bible” *Minneapolis Labor Review* (June 6, 1913), 2.

in 1926.<sup>47</sup> When they scheduled A. Philip Randolph, the President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to give a guest speech at the settlement, the union-affiliated event raised concern. Only a year earlier Randolph had consolidated the union and gained recognition against the Pullman Company, and so his name was well-known throughout the Twin-Cities. The Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies contacted the Phyllis Wheatley House's Head Resident, W. Gertrude Brown. They challenged Brown's decision to allow the union to enter the settlement's facilities on financial grounds: "Do you think that's wise since the Pullman company makes a very generous contribution to the Community Fund?" They also threatened Brown's professional career, asserting that such actions could potentially jeopardize her occupation.<sup>48</sup>

These ties proved fragile and transitory because of women's ambivalent position. As Flynn was removed from major operations of the IWW, Austin Hamlin could find little room to express her labor sympathies without jeopardizing her position in reform organizations more closely aligned to concentrated money. Meanwhile, many working-class women like Masonovich faced the more immediate and pressing needs of everyday life of the Iron Range mining family. Such contingent developments made further cross-class alliances much more difficult to launch in subsequent years.

In closing, let us remember that at the centennial of the Copper Miners' Strike we are also drawing near the centennial of the 1916 strike on the Mesabi. As I mentioned earlier, I intend for this paper to be both an argument and invitation to discuss and weigh-in on similar initiatives. Though these women allied in a short-lived effort and did not necessarily meet success, their stories sharpen the contours and existing history of women's labor activism.

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<sup>47</sup> Hase, "The Phyllis Wheatley House," 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ethel Ray Nance interview with David V. Taylor, May 25, 1974, transcript available at Minnesota Historical Society.

Here I've considered how three very different women came to join forces over a period of months before dissolving their efforts. That this cross-class cooperation proved intermittent perhaps comes as little surprise. Isolation between such women's networks was typical of the period and enduring in much of Minnesota labor movement during subsequent years. But for a brief moment these women came together in unity, leveraging one another's strengths. Together they posed a real threat to the ongoing violence. While we cannot fully account for their fleeting cooperation, or the long-term failure of the strike's outcome, one thing is for sure. This was not only the story the IWW. It was also the story of an ad-hoc coalition of women: The story an Iron Range wife, Mikla Masonovich, and a social reformer and radical organizer who rallied to her side.