

**THE LADIES' GARMENT  
WORKER, VOL. IX,  
NO. 1, 3-5, JANUARY,  
MARCH- MAY, 1918**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649539635

The Ladies' Garment Worker, Vol. IX, No. 1, 3-5, January, March- May, 1918 by Various

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**VARIOUS**

**THE LADIES' GARMENT  
WORKER, VOL. IX,  
NO. 1, 3-5, JANUARY,  
MARCH- MAY, 1918**



# THE LADIES' GARMENT WORKER

## CONTENTS.

Queries and Answers as to Week Work—B. Schlesinger; Our Fourteenth Convention in May, 1918; A Day's Wages for Relief of the War Victims.

Financial and Organizing Problems of Trade Unions—James Wilson.

The American Labor Movement in the Present Crisis—A. R.

Local News and Events—M. H. Danish.

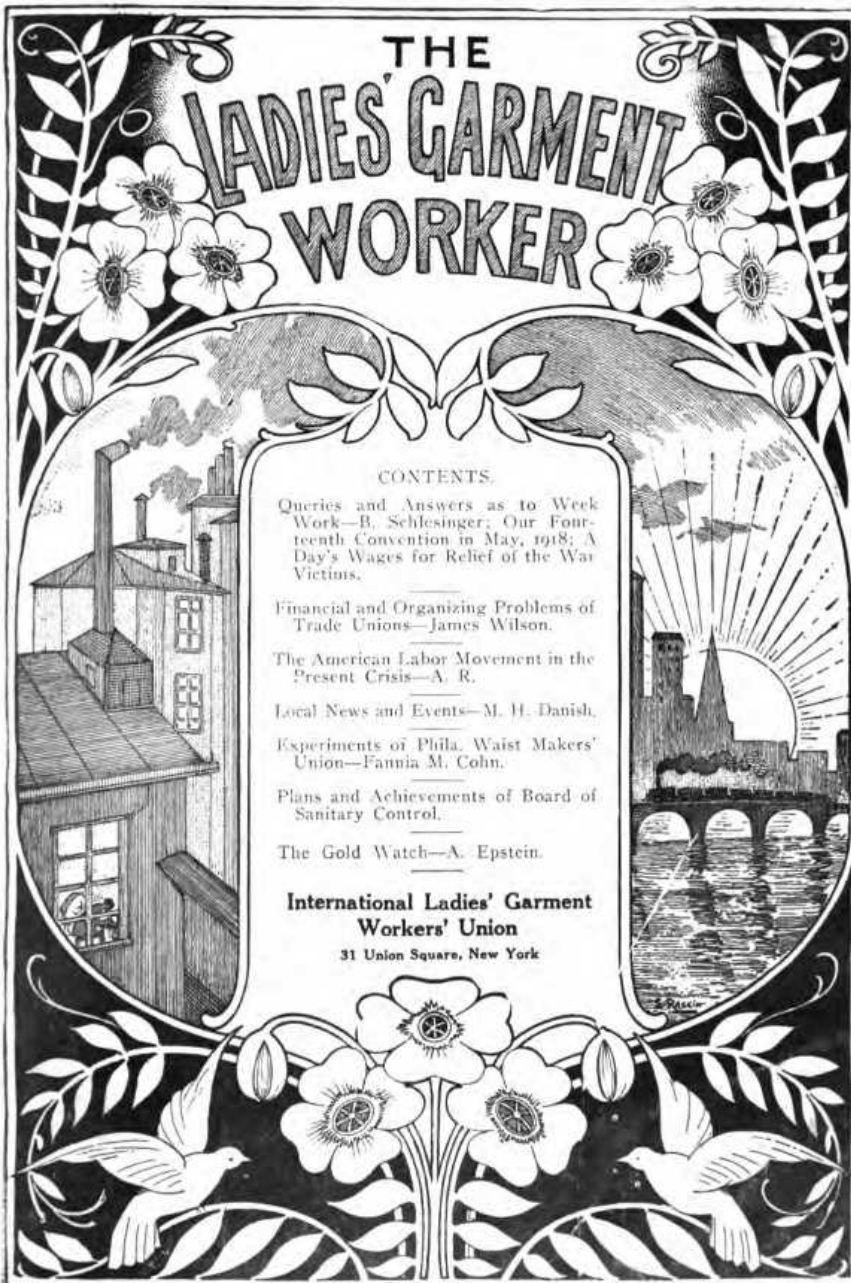
Experiments of Phila. Waist Makers' Union—Fannia M. Cohn.

Plans and Achievements of Board of Sanitary Control.

The Gold Watch—A. Epstein.

**International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union**

31 Union Square, New York



March 5, 1919.

Gift of

Mass. Bureau of Statistics  
**Directory of Local Unions**

LOCAL UNION	OFFICE ADDRESS
1. New York Cloak Operators.....	238 Fourth Ave., New York City
2. Philadelphia Cloakmakers.....	244 S. 8th St., Philadelphia, Pa.
3. New York Piece Tailors.....	9 W. 21st St., New York City
4. Baltimore Cloakmakers.....	1028 E. Baltimore St., Baltimore, Md.
5. New Jersey Embroiderers.....	144 Bergenline Ave., Union Hill, N. J.
6. New York Embroiderers.....	133 2nd Ave., New York City
7. Boston Raincoat Makers.....	38 Causeway St., Boston, Mass.
8. San Francisco Ladies' Garment Workers.....	352-19th Ave.
9. New York Cloak and Suit Tailors.....	228 Second Ave., New York City
10. New York Amalgamated Ladies' Garment Cutters.....	7 W. 21st St., New York City
11. Brownsville, N. Y., Cloakmaker.....	1701 Pitkin Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
12. Boston Cloak Pressers.....	241 Tremont St., Boston, Mass.
13. Montreal, Canada, Cloakmakers.....	37 Prince Arthur, E. Montreal, Canada
14. Toronto, Canada, Cloakmakers.....	194 Spadina Ave., Toronto, Canada
15. Philadelphia Waistmakers.....	40 N. 9th St., Philadelphia, Pa.
16. St. Louis Cloak Cutters.....	Fraternal Building, St. Louis, Mo.
17. New York Reefermakers.....	117 Second Ave., New York City
18. Chicago Cloak and Suit Pressers.....	1815 W. Division St., Chicago, Ill.
19. Montreal, Canada, Cloak Cutters.....	1178 Cadiieux, Montreal, Canada
20. New York Waterproof Garment Workers.....	20 E. 13th St., New York City
21. Newark, N. J., Cloak and Suitmakers.....	103 Montgomery St., Newark, N. J.
22. New Haven Conn., Ladies' Garment Workers.....	83 Hollock St., New Haven, Conn.
23. New York Shirtmakers.....	291 E. 14th St., New York City
24. Boston Skirt and Dressmakers' Union.....	241 Tremont St., Boston, Mass.
25. New York Waist and Dressmakers.....	16 W. 21st St., New York City
26. Cleveland Ladies' Garment Workers.....	314 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio
27. Cleveland Skirt Makers.....	314 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio
28. Seattle, Wash., Ladies' Garment Workers.....	153-15th Ave., Seattle, Wash.
29. Cleveland Cloak Finishers' Union.....	314 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio
30. Cincinnati Ladies' Garment Cutters.....	411 Elm St., Cincinnati, Ohio
32. Winnipeg Ladies' Garment Workers.....	Labor Temple, Winnipeg, Man.
33. Bridgeport Corset Workers.....	414 Warner Building, Bridgeport, Conn.
34. Bridgeport Corset Cutters.....	414 Warner Building, Bridgeport, Conn.
35. New York Pressers.....	228 Second Ave., New York City
36. Boston Ladies' Tailors.....	241 Tremont St., Boston, Mass.
37. Cleveland Cloak Pressers' Union.....	314 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio
39. New Haven Corset Cutters.....	12 Parmelee Ave., New Haven, Conn.

(CONTINUED ON INSIDE BACK COVER)



Named shoes are frequently made in Non-Union factories

**DO NOT BUY ANY SHOE**

no matter what its name, unless it bears a plain and readable impression of this UNION STAMP

All shoes without the UNION STAMP are always Non-Union

Do not accept any excuse for absence of the UNION STAMP

**BOOT AND SHOE WORKERS' UNION**

246 Summer Street, Boston, Mass.

JOHN F. TOBIN, Pres.

CHAS. L. BAINE, Sec'y-Treas.

1127

# THE LADIES' GARMENT WORKER

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

Vol. IX

JANUARY, 1918

No. 1

## QUERIES AND ANSWERS AS TO WEEK WORK.

By B. Schlesinger

In the November issue of the *Ladies' Garment Worker* I referred in general terms to the advantages accruing to the workers from changing the present system of piece work to week work. I want to consider now the other side of this question—the objections of some workers against week work.

In course of the months that the General Executive Board has been agitating for week work we have formed a clear idea of the nature of these objections. At meetings I have addressed I have been asked various questions from which I could see where the shoe pinches. Therefore we want the workers to know that we favor a change only because we have formed the conviction that week work is in all respects the best and most salutary system for the workers in the trade. If we saw in week work the disadvantages which some think they see therein, we should be the first to advise the workers to vote against it.

At the same time we know precisely the fears of some of the workers—why they cannot perceive that the so-called disadvantages of week work rest on baseless theories and ill-conceived opinions. In most cases such opinions are entertained for the reason that these people have no reliable information as to the week work system we aim to introduce. It is easy to talk of week work replacing piece work. But it is not so simple a matter to grasp thoroughly; for the uniform week work system really involves a sort of revolution in the method of work—a reform that is destined to abolish some of the most difficult trade problems and ultimately bring about a thorough change in the relations between the workers and the employers in the factories.

Precisely these points we want to explain in this article.

\* \* \*

Let us first of all consider the objections or apparent disadvantages that some workers find in the change from week work to piece work. We shall take up these objections in detail, subject them to a close analysis and see whether they are as black as they are painted, whether they have any basis in fact.

1. The first objection I have heard many workers advance at a number

of meetings was this: Week work would in time develop into task work, for the reason that the employer will pay different wages to his employees; those who will speed up will get higher pay while those failing in speed will be unable to earn a livelihood. This is only one step removed from task work, and task work is the worst curse of any trade.

They who advance this objection do not understand the fundamental points in the system of week work. They do not realize that the introduction of week work will be accompanied by a minimum scale of wages, and the minimum scale of wages will have to be such as to assure to every worker in the trade a living wage.

To be sure, some workers will get a wage above the minimum. The union cannot limit any advance upward. A highly skilled mechanic of unusual ability will always get more than those of inferior skill. It pays the employer to pay more to such workers. But this is a question to be decided between the specialist and his employer. If the employer will pay him more it will be because he is worth more than the union scale. The worker of higher skill will indirectly regulate his higher wages in accordance with the minimum union scale.

Those who fear the development of task work seem to imagine that the amount of wages will be controlled by the employer or by the joint action of employer and workers in every shop separately, by a price committee, as at present. If this were the plan of the union they would have ground for fear. Fortunately this is not the case. We propose to get a minimum scale for all the workers in the industry, which means that it will not be possible for any employer to offer a wage below the scale, while it will always be possible for some workers to be paid above the scale.

2. The second objection comes from the same source, from an erroneous conception of the proposed system. The imagined disadvantage is as follows:

At present, under the system of piece work the union insists on equal distribution of work in the slack season, so that every worker can earn something in the dull months. But upon week work being established it will not be so easy to insist on this practice. In the slack time the employer may refuse to divide days and hours among all the workers, fearing a deliberate waste of time by the workers in order to earn more wages; consequently many workers who, in the dull season, earn a few dollars a week will be plunged into idleness.

We have stated this objection as clearly and glaringly as possible because we wish all workers to understand the reasons why some are opposed to week work, and we do not want anyone who is not thoroughly familiar with every angle of the question to vote for or against the change.

Our answer to this serious objection is perhaps not so easy to understand as the objection itself, but it is the truth and therefore worth while examining with close attention.

As already intimated, week work must be accompanied by a minimum scale of wages. These two principles are like a body with a soul; one without the other cannot be permitted to exist, for it would be useless.

When the union will come to determine the minimum weekly wage of



an operator the following course will be pursued: First the number of busy weeks in the year or the extent of the seasons will be determined. The next question will be the amount of earnings required by a worker with a family. Then the union will determine a wage that will enable the average worker to earn enough in the months of the season to enable him to live all the year around. This is the method employed in all season trades where the week work system has been introduced.

Let us take the bricklayers for example. The union found that on an average its members work not more than twenty-six full weeks in the year, about half a week instead of a whole week, and set the minimum wage scale so that a worker can earn in three days sufficiently to enable an average family to live decently for a whole week. The minimum wage of a bricklayer is approximately \$8 a day, so that on the average his weekly wages may be said to be about \$28 a week.

When our International Union comes to introduce week work in the cloak trade the same principle will be adopted. We shall figure how much an operator must get every week in the months of the season to enable him to live decently during the entire year. The slack months will be entirely left out of account and the wages of the busy months will have to cover the entire year.

While at this point we want to touch on another fact that everyone should bear in mind in considering the question of week work. We all believe in equal distribution of work in the dull season. The union has waged a prolonged struggle for this principle. But the knowledge that in the slack months they will all have a part of the work as a result of equal division of work moves the workers to be mild in their demands for prices. They somehow believe that if the employer allows them some work in the slack season, they ought to be benevolent to him in the busy time and consent to work for lower prices. And the result is that even in the season they are not paid the proper prices for their work.

Under the week work system this serious defect will vanish. As already stated the union will not consider the scant doles of work in the slack time; its basis for wages will be the busy time. Secondly, the wage scale will be entirely controlled by the union. The workers of any given shop might feel grateful to their employer for affording them some work in the slack time, but they will not be permitted by the union to reward the employer for this by working at lower rates.

3. That brings us to the third so-called "disadvantage" advanced by some as an argument against week work; they fear that workers will secretly accept reduced rates in order to obtain jobs and that this will have a bad effect on the entire trade. The fear has its origin in a current rumor that in other trades where the week work system is established such practices prevail.

We shall not deny that there is ground for this danger; but we say that workers who betray their own interests can be watched and controlled far better under a week work system than under piece work. Moreover, when workers are not true to their own interests at price fixing they hurt not only

themselves but all their fellow workers in the shop. A weak, submissive price committee is apt to ruin the season for all the workers, but when any employee secretly accepts a lower weekly scale he injures himself only.

The trade unions have, in course of years, arrived at various methods whereby to check certain employers who seek to make underhand deals with their week workers. This crafty contrivance of reducing weekly pay diminishes with every year. Our business agents and higher officials in the Cloakmakers' Union know the various employers and individual workers too well to be easily duped. We must also take the psychological factor into account. When there is a fixed wage the honest employer and the intelligent worker will not be tempted to cut it; they will realize that they are doing wrong. But under the present system of price adjustment the reverse is the case—the employer believes it to be his duty as a business man to strive by every means at his disposal to reduce the labor cost as much as possible. Neither do the workers think it wrong to compromise with the employer and "do him a favor," giving him an opportunity to get his work done at smaller cost so as to get him more orders and themselves more work.

\* \* \*

The time has never been so ripe, so favorable and convenient for introducing week work in the cloak trade as at present, and I am convinced that if the present opportunity should be neglected our people will rue the day in later years. I do not believe that another such excellent opportunity will occur so soon. The time is ripe and favorable for the following reason:

Owing to the war the worst obstacle in the way of introducing week work in the cloak trade has disappeared of itself. Before the war the trade harbored all kinds of workers—newly arrived immigrants, half-baked and fully adapted workers. We used to have in the same shop beginners, six-monthly learners, yearly, two-yearly and ten-yearly mechanics. Cloakmaking is a trade requiring long acquired experience and skill. A knowledge of operating at a machine or of stitching together a garment does not constitute a cloakmaker. To draw up a scale of wages under those circumstances would be a most difficult operation. It would be impossible to ask the same wages for a new, inexperienced worker as for a full-fledged mechanic. It would cause considerable dissatisfaction in the ranks.

This serious difficulty has totally disappeared. Since the last four years there has been no influx of fresh immigrants into the cloak trade. All who are employed at cloakmaking have been at it for at least four years, and four-year workers at cloaks are full-fledged mechanics. There can be no mistake about that. If it is possible to become a lawyer in four years' time it is certainly possible to become a qualified cloakmaker in that specified period.

Thus we are now dealing with a trade all the workers of which are full-fledged mechanics, and a workable scale of wages—a scale for all—can be drawn up quickly and quite easily. Possibly some exception will have to be made in some shops, in the case of older people and learners, but this is a mere bagatelle. The trade in general is uniform and will be considered as such by both sides when the weekly scale of wages comes to be drawn up.

And because all the workers in the trade are old hands they will more easily adapt themselves to the weekly system. This could not be said of newly arrived immigrants; the latter come here with their native health unimpaired and with narrow provincial ideas of earning money, and they plunge into work with all their energy. They neither understand the nature of the shop nor realize the importance of conserving their vital strength. These workers have always preferred piece work to week work because piece work afforded them a possibility of earning more money by harder toil and reckless throwing away of energy. They were prepared to sacrifice their health to increase their earnings.

After a few years' time these "bundle grabbers" discover their mistake and begin to feel the results of the raging and tearing kind of labor. They begin to value more their health, regretting their former recklessness. Then they see that week work is much better for them because they need not hurry beyond their strength and the idea of extra earnings by extra exertion is entirely absent.

Almost all the cloakmakers have been long enough in the trade to discover the truth relating to the danger of working too hard; therefore the argument of "working harder to earn more" will not now appeal to them. They will rather be impressed by the advice to conserve their health and energy because they already feel poorer in bones and marrow, and must heed the warning.

The cloakmakers now working in the trade have likewise lost their erstwhile dreams that they would eventually succeed in escaping from the shop and becoming employers. This dream had an adverse effect on many of them. They were willing to submit to any sort of system, however injurious to the trade and themselves, if only they saw a possibility of making some money by extra hard work. They cherished the hope that with that money they would become employers and thus eventually secure rest.

Now this dream has vanished. Now it is almost impossible for anyone to become a real manufacturer for the reason that the cheap immigrant labor of former times is not obtainable any more.

The cloakmakers now in the trade know quite well that their place is in the trade, that they are destined to remain in the trade more or less permanently. Therefore it is their business to have their system of work so arranged as to yield them a living wage in return for a natural, human working day. Week work is such a system.

The week worker is always healthier, more at ease and feels securer than the piece worker. He knows his position in the world. He need not worry when starting on a new garment that it will not yield him enough to earn a week's wages. He need not hurry unduly. He always knows how much his earnings will be and how to order his life accordingly. He can adapt himself to his circumstances because he is thoroughly familiar with them.

Ask any workers formerly employed on piece work and now having a weekly scale of wages, whether they would change back to the piece system, and their answer would be a blunt refusal. They would regard it a great misfortune to be compelled to return to that system.