A CHALLENGE TO A COURAGEOUS COMMITTEE

(Miss Barker)

Courage is mostly a vision and the inclination to work. Unless we see a thing that ought to be done and are willing to work for it, of course we are not going to be very courageous about it. Other things may tend to encourage or discourage courageous action.

The first thing I think a committee should do that intends to do anything for the woman in industry is to promote class consciousness there. That may seem straitling to some people who believe that we should do as much as possible to do away with ideas of indifferences in classes, that there should be no difference between classes, that people should not recognize that there is any difference between them. This is not a question of classes in that sense, but of people working together in a group, - making a contribution to society in groups. The industrial girl belongs to a group having a very important place in society. When a girl this summer said she had not known before how important workers were, I think she had gotten the key to the situation.

Nobody can go anywhere in society and improve conditions that need improving without the people who are there working at that point. The first thing, then, to get better conditions is for those people to be conscious of the fact that as a group they are responsible for the conditions. We have to develop group responsibility. Teachers have found that out. As long as they thought they were performing a great mission and that people ought to bow down before them and give them a great deal of praise, and as much money as possible - particularly a great deal of praise - they didn't get anywhere. So you will not be surprised when I say that the first thing I think we should do is to promote workers' education, - - to become aware of the things that will give an understanding of the forces that affect workers, the forces that govern wages, hours, working conditions, and develop a vision of what a new order in the field of industry could be, what is wrong, and what ought to be, and how those things can be brought about. There is work for group consciousness and an understanding of society at that point.

Then it seems to me that we ought to know conditions in industry here in Atlanta, - (a survey could be made) to set up standards and to create public sentiment for those standards. It is the smallest number of people, I judge, who know anything about conditions under which the girl in industry works. For instance, I heard this summer a description of a workroom and toilet arrangements where there was practically no division between the room where the girls work all day long and what was called a rest room for toilet facilities. They worked all day long in a building without adequate partitions. There ought to be some group in a community whose business it would be to investigate those things and to create sentiment for improved conditions. It seems to me that this committee would be the proper agency to do that.
Then, in another way a group that is working for the woman in industry, it seems to me, should create community consciousness, develop citizenship and participation in the life of the community. The woman in industry has all too little opportunity to know what affects her from a political standpoint or to participate in the forces that are making the community life in that respect. I think we might do something to promote community contacts, interpreting and developing possibilities of improvement and incentives to action in the fields of government agencies, social welfare agencies, politics and political action, education, and recreation.

No group should be isolated in the community life. I think we ought to work from that standpoint. Of course, the purpose would be to develop participation of this group of people in the community life, and then give them a familiarity with the agencies that exist in the community which they could use for their own individual benefit - educational facilities, for instance, and recreational facilities, and the things that promote culture, etc.

Then I think this committee might be helpful in the matter of vocational education. Some one called me last Saturday and said that the N.R.A. is promoting the development of the government educational agencies, doing a good deal to promote training and vocational work. A good deal of money has been set aside for it. Classes for men will be organized immediately. It is a question whether women will be represented in that. Somebody ought to see that women get their share of it, and get classes organized for them. This is something we might give attention to.

Then I think any group ought to, as far as possible, furnish opportunity for individual growth and recreation in its membership. The YWCA Industrial Committee ought to do that, it seems to me, for the women in industry.