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Florence Kelley's Struggle against Child Labour: Revisiting the Obstacles

Zusammenfassung

Florence Kelleys Kampf gegen Kinderarbeit: ein Rückblick auf die Hürden

Florence Kelley (1859–1932) war eine führende US-amerikanische Aktivistin gegen Kinderarbeit. Die meisten biografischen und wissenschaftlichen Darstellungen konzentrieren sich auf ihre Erfolge. Dieser biografiegeschichtliche Beitrag analysiert und kategorisiert jedoch die bislang kaum diskutierten Hindernisse, die Kelley im Laufe ihres aktivistischen Lebens überwinden musste. Auf Grundlage ihrer privaten Schriften aus der New York Public Library, ihrer Autobiografie und edierter Briefe rückt dieser Aufsatz ihre persönlichen Erfahrungen ins Zentrum und rekonstruiert die Schattenseiten ihres Lebens als Aktivistin. Die historische Darstellung von Kelleys Misserfolgen ermöglicht den Leser*innen einen Eindruck von ihrem Durchhaltevermögen, ihrer Intelligenz und strategischen Anpassungsfähigkeit. Oftmals gaben vermeintliche berufliche und private Hindernisse ihrer aktivistischen Laufbahn neue Impulse. Insgesamt rekonstruiert dieser Beitrag auch weniger bekannte Alltagshürden (z. B. ihre Scheidung) und setzt sich kritisch mit der literarischen Darstellung von Kelleys Aktivismus auseinander.

Schlüsselwörter
Florence Kelley, Bewegung gegen Kinderarbeit, USA, Frauenrechte, gesellschaftlicher Aktivismus, Biografie

Summary

Florence Kelley (1859–1932) was a leading American reformer and activist against child labour. As an admired national icon, most of the biographical and scholarly accounts focus on her achievements. This article, by contrast, analyses and categorises the numerous obstacles Kelley had to face in her activist life, hereto barely discussed in the Kelley literature. Drawing mainly on her private papers from the New York Public Library, her autobiography, and edited letters, it focuses on her personal experiences and helps to reconstruct the shadowy sides of her activism. Offering an unpolished historical account rather than a simple and incomplete success story, it aims to give readers a grasp of her perseverance, intelligence, and capacity to change her strategy in pursuit of her goals. Often what seemed to be an obstacle turned out to be an important crossroads on the way towards the next important step in her activist life. Overall, the article reconstructs and categorises episodes involving the lesser-known everyday obstacles she faced, but also critically revisits the way Kelley's activism has been portrayed in the literature.

Keywords
Florence Kelley, movement against child labour, USA, women's rights, social activism, biography

1 Introduction

Florence Kelley (1859–1932) was an American reformer and leading activist against child labour. She dedicated her life to the quest for welfare and social rights initiatives, especially women's and children's employment rights but also other causes like women's suffrage. Born into a prosperous advocacy family, she lived in and actively shaped a pe-

riod of deep societal transformation; the self-proclaimed Progressive Era (1880–1930).[1] This period in U.S. history was marked by mass migration; these migrants constituted the industrial labour force for what rapidly became the world's largest economy. Kelley's mentee, colleague, and friend, Frances Perkins, who served as the U.S. Secretary of Labor (1933–1945), observed in her recollections on Kelley that her lifespan encompassed a "critical period of change in the US" (Perkins 1954: 12), starting with the abolition of slavery which influenced Kelley as a child, followed by the end of civil war, and industrial development.[2] Kelley thus belonged to a widespread web of actors advocating for societal change: middle-class reformers, intellectuals, organised labour, workers, women suffragists, politicians, enlightened entrepreneurs, and academics. Collectively, they moulded as "the emergence of modern America" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxi). Sklar, Schüler, and Strasser have also used the term "social justice feminists" (Sklar/Schüler/Strasser 1998: 4ff.) to describe female protagonists who advocated for both women's rights and social justice goals, of which Kelley serves as an exemplar.[3]

Focusing on Kelley's struggle against child labour, this article asks: What kind of obstacles did she face, how did she react to them, and what was the outcome? Rather than focusing on a single conflict, it aims to systematise a variety of conflict lines and antagonists Kelley faced as a social reformer.

2 Kelley in the literature

Kelley has been the subject of substantial, and generally favourable, coverage in the historiographical literature. Most biographical and scholarly accounts emphasise her achievements and outstanding contribution to American history. The first two full-length biographies were largely based on Kelley's autobiography, published in 1926 and 1927 as a series of articles in the progressive journal *The Survey*.[4] The first was published in 1953 by Josephine Goldmark, a former colleague of Kelley's, who helped her compile a set of reports and statistics (the Brandeis brief) documenting the adverse health effects on over-worked women, produced to support the defence of the ten-hour law for women workers before the United States Supreme Court (known as *Muller vs. Oregon*). This brief is the focus of Goldmark's biography, which otherwise adopts a rather sober tone, avoiding overt admiration. The second biography focuses on the first four decades rather than the more crisis-driven latter years of Kelley's life and was published in 1966 by Dorothy R. Blumberg, who drew on sources including documents from the Kelley family papers, letters, and Kelley's early writings.

One of the most comprehensive biographies was published in 1997: Kathryn K. Sklar's *Florence Kelly and the Nation's Work*. It covers Kelley's life until about 1900,

1 Critics regard the term "Progressive Era" as a euphemism, because many reformers aimed for moderate rather than radical change. For a recent study, see Recchiuti (2007).

2 Perkins was the first woman appointed to the U.S. cabinet.

3 The term "social justice feminism" was first used by William O'Neill and scholars disagree about its usefulness, see Cott (1989).

4 These articles were edited and annotated by Kathryn Sklar, who explained the context of the writing. Essentially, Kelley intended to defend herself against right-wing attacks during the 1920s, addressed in the remainder of this article, see Sklar [Kelley] (1986).

when she became leader of the National Consumer League and was transformed from a community and state level activist into a national reformer. Rich in source material, the book details Kelley's strength and talents and places her in the broader context of American women's political culture. Sklar's study also responds to a body of critical feminist literature that has questioned the women's progressive reformers strategy known as maternalism. This refers to the policy of advocating primarily women's rights (rather than equal rights for men and women) on the basis of motherhood (and debatable, traditional gender roles), and the idea of transforming the State into a 'nurturing mother'[5].

Sklar implicitly defends Kelley from such critique by arguing that she was not primarily a maternalist. Rather than simply privileging the category of women, Sklar maintains, Kelley's prime concern was with class, and she used gender-based legislation merely as a strategy to fight for equal labour rights for women and men (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxv). As it was difficult to further the cause of better working conditions for both sexes on the basis of class, she deliberately fought for women's and children's rights initially, with the aim of striving for adult working men's rights once the former had been achieved. Based on Kelley's explicit statements, the authors conclude that she used "maternalism […] as a strategy to obtain social rights for all workers" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxv).[6] In sum, Sklar offers evidence that Kelley used gender-specific legislation as a tool to overcome class frictions in a two-step process. She highlights this gender-based strategy as the distinctive characteristic of the U.S. women's movement, in contrast to its British counterpart, which used class rather than gender as the focus for state intervention (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 167f.).

While Sklar's biography and later work address the 'maternalist critique' it only briefly acknowledges another frequent accusation; that middle-class Anglo-American female reformers tried to force their concept of womanhood onto other classes and races (often dubbed 'educating the working classes' particularly immigrants), effectively preventing an alternative welfare system like those implemented in Europe.[7] In his book review, Louis W. Banner even claims that while many historians may "welcome Sklar's positive stance" (Banner 1997: 902), the passionate tone leads readers "to suspect she has become too involved with her subject" (Banner 1997: 902). He also argues that the difficulties Kelley had to face "are slighted" (Banner 1997: 902). Together with Palmer, Sklar coedited a valuable selection of 275 out of a total of 3 100 of Kelley's letters. It privileges letters elucidating her public role and relationship with her three children (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xlvii–xlviii).

While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail how the achievements of female reformers more generally have been evaluated, what matters here is that the literature on social justice feminists like Kelley is largely, if not exclusively, favourable. As is the case with the Progressive Era, recent literature offers a more mixed assessment. In hindsight, while the achievements of the progressive movement are acknowledged, praise has given way to a more cautious judgement on the movement's success. The long-term

5 Such maternalist laws were accused of reifying breadwinner ideals, see Skocpol (1992: 34).

6 They highlight an 1897 article in which Kelley acknowledged this tactic. See Kelley, Florence (1897). "Die weibliche Fabrikinspektion in der Vereinigten Statten" [sic] reprinted as "Women as Factory Inspectors in the United States" in: Sklar/Schüler/Strasser (1998: 103).

7 See, for example, Banner (1997). For a recent example of a study questioning the real intentions of child welfare reformers, see Tiffin (1982).

legacy of progressive reformers' efforts against child labour has also been critically revisited.[8] Even though Kelley's contribution to provisions against child labour is evident in both state and federal laws, most importantly The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938, which she did not live to see, many historians have questioned the overall success of the so-called reform-movement and criticised its moderate approach for failing to produce the more extensive child labour legislation witnessed in other countries.[9]

In sum, most of the literature on Florence Kelley's life and work spotlights her successes. This article, however, aims to illuminate and systematize the multitude of obstacles Kelley faced and her responses to them. Rather than presenting the findings chronologically, I distinguish between the following categories: obstacles she faced as a woman, as a professional factory inspector and hands-on activist against child labour, as an activist for women's rights, socialism, and pacifism (obstacles from *outside*), obstacles she faced from *within* different social movements, and her personal misfortunes.

In general, Kelley faced significant resistance because she promoted values that clashed with the *Zeitgeist* and, more importantly, because she called for direct action to transform the status quo. As Sklar and Palmer have observed, instead of individualism, she championed social rights and communal responsibility; instead of a growing gap between rich and poor, she promoted strategies to redistribute wealth; instead of accepting an increasing separation between the producer and consumer, she convinced them of their shared interests, and managed to persuade businessmen in a society which glorified unregulated capital, that humane working conditions were important (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxiv).

3 Impediments as a woman

The gender-related obstacles Kelley faced may for heuristic purposes be divided into structural and personal ones. Structurally, women's roles at the time were limited; married women were not allowed to hold professional roles, and were barred from university education.[10] In her autobiography, Kelley recalls how she was barred from studying ancient Greek at the University of Pennsylvania (UPEN). At the time, this was justified on the grounds that young men and women should not mix in the classroom. However, years later her family discovered that UPEN did not even offer advanced Greek at that time (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 46, 54). Kelley describes the struggles for women to enter higher education, a fate shared with people of colour, and criticises the lack of women in high-ranking university and judicial posts, especially the Supreme Court (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 55ff.).

Barred by UPEN, Kelley decided to study in Zurich where she became acquainted with Socialism and Marx. This first-hand experience of gender discrimination also seems to have nourished her zeal for educating women. In 1882, she opened an evening school for working girls at the New Century Club, which was free of charge and met with high demand (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 64).

8 See, for example, Felt (1970).
9 For a concise discussion of the U.S. child labour laws' shortcomings, see Hindman (2006).
10 On women's role in the nineteenth century, see Brady (1991: 103ff.).

When her husband, Lazare Wischnetzky, a Russian Jew and trained physician, struggled professionally and financially in early 1891, he started to physically attack her (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 32). Unsurprisingly, she remains mute on the abuse she suffered in her autobiographical writings, as well as in her letters. The divorce file in her private papers mentions that her husband attacked her physically and verbally (NYPL, *Florence Kelley Files*, Box 12, Folder 4). As a consequence, she sought refuge at Hull House in Chicago in late December 1891 and reverted to using her maiden name for both herself and her children (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 56).

In addition to the physical abuse, Kelley's letters reveal that her divorce – especially the trial regarding the children's custody – constituted not just a financial but a psychological burden. In early 1892, the situation became so tense that she had to temporarily hide her children and could not see them (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 57). In a letter to her mother, Caroline Bonsall Kelley, of June 1892, immediately after her divorce, she writes that she is well despite "all the strain of the trial [divorce], which was terrific" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 60). The financial strain and her struggle to pay the bills is a recurrent theme in her letters.

At Hull House in Chicago, she began to develop her life-long career as an activist for social legislation. Kelley's approach was methodical and comprised several stages: researching a problem, studying a solution, drafting a law based on expert advice, lobbying for the law through various means (speeches, publications, personal encounters), publicly celebrating the law's ratification, and defending the ratified law (as in the U.S. laws could still be rescinded); and lastly, monitoring the enforcement of laws and denouncing their violation. If one goal was achieved, she would move on to the next problem to be solved (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxviii).

4 Obstacles faced as a child labour expert and Chief Factory Inspector

If, as a divorced woman and resident of the well-connected Hull House, Kelley had the platform from which to launch her professional career at a local and state level, she nonetheless faced numerous obstacles as a child labour expert and Chief Factory Inspector for the state of Illinois during the 1890s. While it is remarkable that Kelley was appointed to this prestigious position, she only got the job because a man declined (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 83).[11] In her autobiography, she analyses the reasons for the passage of the law which first introduced provisions for the inspection system – the 1893 Illinois child labour law. Kelley herself had authored the law and describes it as "a milestone in the national history of our industry and our jurisprudence" (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 83). She had twelve people working for her; was given $12 000 a year for salaries, office and travel costs, and earned $ 1 500 a year (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 85f.).

She faced difficulties from the outset. The local press denounced her work and described her as "an extreme socialist agitator who hardly differs from an anarchist"

11 Illinois Governor Altgeld was a friend of Hull House and initially offered the chief inspector post to Mr. Lloyd, who declined.

(*Chicago Tribune*, 31 July 1893, p. 4 cited in Sklar/Palmer 2009: 68). Her work as Chief Factory Inspector was sabotaged by public officials. In one instance, in 1894, she tried to bring an employer to court for his part in causing an eleven-year-old boy's arm to become paralysed after working with poison. When she tried to get the district attorney of Cook Country to apply a penalty based on "complete" evidence, he refused to take her case (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 86). The employer "practically laugh[ed] into her face" (Dreier 2012: 74). Undermining her authority as Chief Factory Inspector, the public official apparently sided with the employer. While undoubtedly a blow to her activism, this incident, too, reshaped her activist strategy. Furious, she registered at Northwestern University in 1894 and started attending evening lectures to gain a law degree (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 86). This would turn out to be instrumental in her legal struggles both at state level and with the Supreme Court.

Her work as an investigator and then Chief Factory Inspector took a physical and mental toll on her. As sweatshops, factories and the Chicago slums lacked adequate sanitary equipment (and health insurance for their workers), Kelley was continually exposed to contagious diseases like smallpox and tuberculosis. In her autobiography, she tells an amusing anecdote from 1893. On this occasion, an official inquiry commission had been set up by the state of Illinois to examine children and women's labour. A year later, the Illinois child labour law would introduce the inspection system because of that commission's work. Kelley and her colleague, Mary Kenney "volunteered as guides" (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 71). As Hull House residents, they knew the neighbourhood very well and offered legislators valuable direct witness accounts and contacts. One of the commissioners, however, refused to enter the sweatshops because he wanted to spare his own children from catching "some infection" (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 71). Dreier reports that once someone, possibly a factory owner, even fired a warning shot at her (Dreier 2012: 73).

The mental strain on her, as evidenced in her letters, has so far been neglected in the historical literature. In a letter to her mother she describes how slum life drained her energy: the "horrors of the slums settle down upon my spirits but only for a few moments in time. Then I am all right again" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 60).[12] Two years later, in a letter to Henry D. Lloyd, her friend and foster father to her three children, she writes that she "had moments of longing to get away from my slum and my drudgery" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 76).[13] Even for a resilient activist[14] like Florence Kelley, the close daily contact with slum life was not always easy to bear.

The most demoralising defeat – both personal and political – Kelley suffered was her sacking from the post of Chief Factory Inspector in August 1897 (Sklar 1995: 286).[15] In 1895, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association challenged the new 1893 working legislation, including the provisions against child labour, in court, and the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that the eight-hour provision of the law drafted by Kelley was unconstitutional. Two years later, Altgeld had lost the election, and the new Governor, John Tanner,

12 Letter to her mother of 2 June 1892 [ca.].
13 Kelley's children lived for most of the time with the Lloyds, making it possible for Kelley to focus on her professional duties. Letter to Henry D. Lloyd of 18 July 1894 in Sklar/Palmer (2009).
14 As Josephine Goldmark called her, see Goldmark (1953).
15 Kelley was "shock[ed]" (Sklar 1995: 286).

who had close relations with the business community, fired Kelley (Dreier 2012: 74).[16] Financially, the dismissal was problematic, too, and she started to support her family by working in a library, teaching, public-speaking, and writing occasional articles for German newspapers.[17] By 1899, she had already co-established and become director of the National Consumer League (NCL), headquartered in New York City, the centre for most reformers.

Prior to her appointment to the NCL, she faced another professional setback. Despite the recommendations of powerful reformers, Kelley failed to secure her desired post as Chief Factory Inspector of New York City. As Kelley's letter to Lili Wald of 24 January 1899 shows, she had actively sent a message to Theodore Roosevelt asking to be appointed to that job. The famous reformer Jacob A. Riis had tried to arrange a personal appointment with his friend Roosevelt, but for unknown reasons, it did not happen. The same letter shows that Kelley only accepted the post as NCL general secretary after learning that she had not been chosen as NYC Factory Inspector (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 96f.).[18] While she regarded the NCL post as her second choice, in hindsight it turned out to be instrumental to her subsequent children's and women's rights activism. With Kelley's help, a solid network of local NCL branches was created throughout the U.S., and the NCL became a powerful player in national politics (Sklar/Palmer 2008: xxiv).

Another major professional setback was the ultimate defeat of the Promotion of the Welfare and Hygiene of Maternity and Infancy Act or Sheppard-Towner Act. The 1921 Sheppard-Towner Act on Maternity and Infancy Protection foresaw federal pre- and post-natal programs and health care measures designed to curb the infant mortality rate, as investigations by the Children's Bureau had documented that it was one of the highest among the industrialised nations (Skopcol 1992: 10). It was the first piece of federal U.S. health legislation (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 224). The legislative disputes about the Sheppard-Towner Act have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Wilson 2007). What matters here is to outline why it turned out to be such a reversal for Kelley. This was the biggest professional defeat of her lifetime, at least in her own view.

The Sheppard-Towner Act passed Congress following lengthy debates and lobbying, but it could still be rescinded if the states withheld their approval and the Supreme Court annulled it. Thus, the period between 1922 and 1924 was troublesome for Kelley. She had to defend the Sheppard-Towner Act at both state and federal level. Simultaneously, she was campaigning for the ratification of an amendment to the Constitution barring child labour, but despite its ratification by Congress in 1924, it was subsequently rejected by various states, frequently as a result of popular referenda. While right-wing attacks against Kelley and her allies like the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC) provided one explanation for this defeat, as highlighted by Wilson, the referenda offer an alternative explanation: families wanted their children to contribute to the family economy (Wilson 2007: 148). Thus, resistance to Kelley's reform legislation did not come solely from manufacturers and their allies, but also from 'below'. In her

16 See also the press clippings in NYPL, *Florence Kelley Files*, Box 11, File 3, "Betrayed by Tanner", *Chicago Times Herald*, 6 September 1897, p. 4.

17 For details see Sklar (1995: 286ff.).

18 See also Blumberg (1966: 172ff.).

autobiography, Kelley writes: "Of all the activities […] none is, I am convinced, of such fundamental importance as the Sheppard-Towner Act", because it "establishes the principle that the Republic shares with each state responsibility for the life and health of the children" (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 31f.). She refused to accept that the child labour law had failed; in a letter to Virginia Roderick dated 24 July 1926 she claims that it has "not failed; it is merely delayed" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 383).

Frances Perkins has also stressed the significant opposition Kelley encountered, in general, and the various defeats she suffered in her struggle for a federal child labour law, in particular. To prohibit child labour in a nationwide law nonetheless remained one of her main aims. In Perkin's view, her efforts to achieve state legislation on women's working hours were similarly "remarkable" (Perkins 1954: 18). Even if state laws were successfully ratified, they were often challenged in court afterwards.[19]

5 Attacks on women's rights, socialism, and pacifism

Directly connected to the defence of the Sheppard-Towner Act are the hostile red-scare defamations levelled against Kelley during the 1920s. They can be traced through the numerous press clippings held in her private paper collection at the New York Public Library (NYPL, *Florence Kelley Files*, Box 11, Files 3 and 5; Box 12, File 10). These attacks originated from *outside* of her reform network – the subject of this section. While they targeted numerous accomplished women reformers (e.g. Grace Abbot, Jane Addams, and Julia Lathrop), Kelley was the prime victim. Sklar and Palmer argue that, as a socialist, Kelley was "a perfect target" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 360).[20]

In her private papers and her autobiography, she directly condemns her main antagonist in Congress, Senator Thomas F. Bayard Jr. (1868–1942; Democrat, Delaware), whose attacks on her are recorded in the Congressional Records (NYPL, *Florence Kelley Files*, Box 10 Folder 15, Sheppard Towner Act, no date). Kelley complained to Paul Kellog, the editor in chief of *The Survey*, that Bayard had read into the Congressional Record "thirty-five pages of the *Woman Patriot's* abusive misrepresentations, with me as the chief Villain Acting for Moscow!" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 360).[21] Bayard denounced Kelley as a Bolshevik supporter trying to "subvert and corrupt the minds of children" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 385). He further told the congressmen:

> "For 40 years modern revolutionary communism, under the original, direct instructions of Friederich Engels and Karl Marx, its founders, has had in the United States a thoroughly trained, educated, and experienced leader, who is perhaps the ablest legislative general communism has produced – Mrs. Florence Kelley" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 385).[22]

19 For the power struggle in the U.S. between the states and Congress, and the Supreme Court and Congress, see Sklar/Palmer (2009: xxxiii).

20 According to Kelley, Jane Addams was "[m]ost virulently" attacked personally, see her letter of 27 May 1924 to Herbert B. Swope, executive editor of the *New York World* (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 339f.).

21 Letter from Kelley to Paul Kellogg of 17 August 1926, in Sklar/Palmer (2009).

22 69th Congress. 1st sess., Cong. Rec., 3 July 1926, 12931 and 12941 quoted in Sklar/Palmer (2009).

In her autobiography, Kelley dismisses his allegations as "queer and dull" and as constituting a weak strategy to conceal a lack of proper arguments: "when counsel for the defense has no case, he abuses the plaintiff's attorney" (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 33).

The malicious assaults on her patriotism climaxed in 1924 and 1926. In 1924, the U.S. Department of War produced a flyer aggressively entitled: "The Socialist-Pacifist Movement in America is an Absolutely Fundamental and Integral Part of International Socialism". It contained a chart that sought to denounce several women's organisations and their connections (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 287).[23] Both the article and graph were reprinted by manufacturers (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 288, 339f.). In response to the chart, national women's suffrage leader, Carrie Chapmann Catt, asked what manufacturers were afraid of: "Is it the abolition of child labor, education or peace?" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 288), and issued a rallying cry: "Women of America, don't get frightened; think. Don't be intimidated; act" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 288). In 1924, the journal *Woman Patriot* denounced Kelley as "the most subversive woman reformer", and in 1926, it systematically published articles opposing Kelley's campaigns in support of the Sheppard-Towner Act (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 288). In return, Kelley asked Jane Addams and Frances Perkins to mobilise their network of people capable of influencing public opinion, including Walter Lippmann (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 289).[24] Florence Kelley considered bringing a libel suit twice but opted against it. In her letter of 20 August 1926, addressed to John A. Ryan (1869–1945), Professor at the Catholic University of America, she explained that to "lose such a suit would be an incalculably great disaster" (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 385).

6 Impediments from *within* movements

Like other social justice feminists, Kelley strategically formed "cross-class alliances" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxii, 100). This was perhaps one of her key talents: to build alliances across class, gender, religion and race. However, even within the various social movements that she belonged to – and she participated in most of them – she faced different kinds of conflicts. While the antagonism within the post-suffrage women's movement was particularly severe, Kelley also confronted leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), National Child Labour Committee (NCLC), and American Federation of Labor (AFL). The problem revolved around various reform strategies which were tied to different power interests.

While Senator Bayard attacked Kelley in 1926, she had already faced exclusion and hostility from her fellow socialists in New York three decades earlier. Upon her return to America in the late 1880s, Florence Wischnetzky and her husband wanted to join the socialist party in New York, which was largely composed of ethnic German men. She was denied access for many reasons: as a woman; an American citizen; and as an independent and free thinker (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxix, xxx). In a letter to Henry D. Lloyd she complains:

23 It was published as "Are Women's Clubs used by Bolshevists?" in *Dearborn Independent*, 24, 15 March 1924, p. 2.

24 For further information on women's defiance, see Sklar/Baker (1998).

"[T]he present Socialist organization in this country, is a most undesirable one. The Practise of expelling everyone who can speak English from the Socialist Labour Party […] is so nearly universal, that the party is very largely a bunch of greenhorns" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 83).[25]

During the 1920s, Kelley encountered major difficulties within the women's movement, when the movement split into two main camps which resulted in competing women's organisations with antagonistic gender-rights strategies. Social feminists advocated for what came to be known as a gender-based strategy, while equal rights feminists embraced individualism and equal rights for men and women.[26] As mentioned previously, Kelley pursued a gendered labour law tactic. The National Woman's Party (NWP), under its leader Alice Paul, followed a different strategy (Sklar/Palmer 2009: xxxiv). Representing mainly professional women who would not benefit from Kelley's women worker's laws, which targeted the neediest women, the NWP fiercely opposed Kelley and defended gender-neutral equality before the law. Hence, between 1925 and 1927, Kelley not only experienced a phase of demoralising and personal right-wing attacks but was also confronted by the dissenting camp within the women's movement led by Alice Paul, who joined the opponents of the Sheppard-Towner Act (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 284). While the duel was personified by the two opposing leader figures it stood in *pars pro toto* for two competing visions within the women's movement regarding the role of the state and the function of law. As Nancy Woloch explains, while social feminists "hoped to enhance the role of the state" (Woloch 2015: 132), the NWP members, champions of an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), "embraced individualism" (Woloch 2015: 132).

Kelley faced comparable disputes with the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People's (NAACP) leaders, although they were on a smaller scale, shorter, and, most importantly, peacefully resolved. Again, ethnic, class, and gender loyalties lay at the heart of the conflict. In 1911, Florence Kelley became one of the founding members of the NAACP and she served as an active board member for two decades. Critics claim that her activism for coloured Americans has been downplayed in the historical literature; from dictionary entries to full-length biographies (Athey 1971: 249; Aptheker 1966: 98).[27] Yet, her activities in support of political and social rights for coloured persons offer valuable insights into the everyday frictions she had to deal with as an activist.

Louis L. Athey, one of the few scholars to study Kelley's anti-racist activities in greater detail, points to the limited success of her activism for the coloured population and shows the cynical comments it attracted from both her friends and foes. Kelley lacked full support for her anti-racist activism within women's rights circles. In 1922, much to her shock, the National League of Women Voters denied Kelley their support for the Dyer Anti-lynching Act (Athey 1971: 257). However, when she proposed that everyone should receive equal funding for education, regardless of gender, race, and ethnicity, she was attacked by the President of Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi,

25 Letter to Henry D. Lloyd of 18 June 1896.

26 For an insightful, recent study about the post-suffrage division of the women's movement, see Woloch (2015).

27 Athey denounces the historical literature for containing "almost nothing about her activities" in support of the coloured population. It will be interesting to see how Sklar will address the question in the second part of her biography which will cover the period from 1900 onwards.

D. M. Key, who remarked that her claim would have been "more effective if originated by the colored folks of Mississippi" (Athey 1971: 251, 254). It seemed that a white woman could not advocate for a coloured person. Similar attacks were launched against her activism on behalf of the working class due to her elite background. She had to win approval to be recognised in workers' and socialist circles and prove that her advocacy for the working population was genuine.

Kelley was also a naturally combative person, though her personal animosities are less well-documented in the literature. A good example involves the NAACP leader W.E.B. Du Bois. On 16 March 1932, in a speech during the memorial services held following Kelley's death, Du Bois mentions that he had several constructive conflicts with her (Athey 1971: 254). Several other close friends and colleagues shared that experience. In her recollections on Kelley, Frances Perkins writes: "Explosive, hot-tempered, determined, she was no gentle saint. She spoke accusingly and passionately" (Perkins 1954: 18). As an intellectual with strong emotions, "she was indeed a terrifying opponent to those who did not have either humane passion or the gift of moving speech" (Perkins 1954: 18) in public hearings. Intellectually quick and always armed with facts and figures, her talent as a discussant impressed her contemporaries. Another friend of Kelley's, Newton Baker, commented at her funeral: "Everyone was brave from the moment she came into the room" (Dreier 2012: 76).

Yet, this belligerent nature was also regarded as a strength. Du Bois praises Kelley's courage, and the fact that she never tried to avoid conflict: "daring, unflinchingly and with open mind and willing intelligence, [she was always ready] to face a situation no matter how difficult of understanding or how startling its implications and command" (Aptheker 1966: 100).[28] In Du Bois' view, she violated conventions in many ways – as a socialist, pacifist, a champion of gender equality and religious freedom, as an advocate of children's rights and a lively democracy – yet, he contends, she lost most "fair weather friends" (Aptheker 1966: 100) because she defended the rights of coloured Americans.

Kelley also faced frictions with the leaders of the NCLC, the nationwide organisation against child labour that she and Lili Wald had co-founded in 1904, which led to her eventual resignation from it. As early as 1908, she criticised the NCLC leaders for failing to forcefully support the Beveridge Bill against child labour of 1906. The Beveridge Bill that eventually failed was the first federal legal initiative aimed at curbing child labour and it proposed a minimum working age of fourteen in mining and manufacturing and an age-related limit on working hours (Hindman 2009: 484). In a letter to her son Nicolas Kelley (called Ko) dated 6 April 1908, she called the NCLC leaders "moral cowards" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 172f., 168). Similarly, Kelley protested against what she perceived as a lack of NCLC support for her threatened child labour law in the 1920s. As well as the right-wing attacks, Kelley also had to contend with the NCLC occasionally questioning her child labour law, as she complained in a letter to Lili Wald of 4 April 1927. Moreover, she accused the NCLC of failing to support her petition for the child labour law, which she had organised as a last resort, imitating a successful women's suffrage petition from 1917 (however, Kelley only gathered a negligible few thousand signatures in support of the child labour law) (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 358).

28 The speech has been reprinted by Herbert Aptheker (1966: 100).

In the aforementioned letter she even tried to convince Lili Wald to either resign, or influence the NCLC leaders: "How long are you going to continue to give the weight of your honoured name to the National Child Labor Committee which is incessantly occupied in spreading the idea […] that the time is not ripe for our petition?" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 358, 399f.). Kelley asked her to at least use her influence on the board: "to get them to abandon this policy of obstruction" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 399), or she would have no option but to attack the NCLC directly: "I don't want to get into an open fight with them, but if they keep on doing this I shall […] be driven to denounce them as obstructionists, and question the validity of their claim that they represent the interest of working children in this country" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 399). Kelley's relationship with the NCLC remained strained until her death (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 168). At the root of their dispute lay opposing strategies towards tackling child labour. The NCLC directors were generally more compromising on the details and welcomed state child labour provisions; they also maintained that softer laws would be more willingly accepted in the South. Kelley, by contrast, favoured "constancy over compromise" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 223). In her view, only federal legislation would prevent companies from moving southwards, and stop the whitewashing of child labour laws on a state-by-state basis.

Similar conflicts characterised her relations with AFL leader Samuel Gomper, whom she regarded as too moderate and compromising (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 223, 357). Although in a letter to Friedrich Engels of December 1887, she referred to Gompers appreciatively, associating him with "the more wide-awake, progressive and influential men among the English-speaking organizations" (Sklar 1995: 136), her disapproval of his actions grew as time went on. Rather than defending worker's rights on a national and comprehensive level (for example, by forming a national labour party or advocating federal labour policies), he favoured direct consultations with employers. After the AFL's withdrawal from politics, Kelley no longer regarded it as a potential coalition partner (Sklar 1995: 137f.). In her view, Gomper had moreover failed to support rights claims by women, immigrants, and people of colour, become too closely aligned with the Democratic Party, and in the process had compromised too much on workers' rights goals (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 399f.).

The list of Kelley's skirmishes with reformers and reform organisations could be extended. In 1915, she came into conflict with the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL), when they failed to support her minimum wage campaign. Kelley's campaigns focused on single women, who comprised 75 percent of wage-earning women at the time. Kelley attacked the AALL because they planned to offer child benefit to married women (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 168). In conclusion, even within the reform camp, Kelley faced numerous conflicts, ranging from hostile opposition to the WMP to minor, temporary disagreements with her colleague and friend Du Bois.

7 Personal calamities

Kelley also experienced personal tragedies. From her marriage to Lazare Wischnewetzky, Kelley had three children: Nicholas, born in 1885, Margaret born in 1886, and John, born in 1888. On 28 September 1905, her only daughter Margaret unexpectedly died

from a heart attack. Kelley was shattered, Perkins writes in her recollections. However, there is scant reference to Kelley's grief in her letters, let alone her autobiographical work, and this omission seems telling (Perkins 1954: 19).

Florence Kelley died of colon cancer, on 17 February 1932 (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 425). In a letter of 30 October 1931, when she was already hospitalised, she wrote to Emily Sims Marconnier: "I have been in hell since a week ago" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 483) (describing her radiotherapy treatment). With three months still to go, she seemed to know she was dying: "It is the worst to date and, as to my impending escape [death], it is also the best" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 483).

Her letters provide valuable insights into what she regarded as her lifetime's failures. In a letter to Lili Wald of 21 January 1927, she considers a series of questions including: her biggest social achievements over the last forty years, her failures, and her visions for the future. As her main social achievements, Kelley lists the following: 1) "Votes for women", 2) "progress of the Negro race", 3) "creation of the nursing profession", 4) "[s]ettlements", 5) the "Children's Bureau", and 6) "rural good roads" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 393ff.).

As her life-time failures**,** Kelley lists: 1) the "U.S. Supreme Court's vetoes of the federal child labour laws, and the minimum wage law", 2) "the legislatures' delay of the federal child labour amendment; and the timorous attitude of the National and State Child Labor Committees in response hereto", 3) the "absence of women from the [U.S.] Senate", 4) the "pitiful small number of women who are full professors" at first rank universities, 5) the end of the "tuberculosis crusade", and 6) "the community chest movement", which she rejects as a vehicle to repress "social thought and action" (Sklar/Palmer 2009: 393ff.). Mushrooming in the USA in the 1920s and 1930s, the community chest movement involved coordinated fund-raising groups that collected money from local businesses and recruited workers for community projects (Todd 1932: 476ff.). What remains are Kelley's abundant letters, her prolific writings, and extensive traces stored in archival repositories like the NCL collection. The detailed scholarship on Kelley, Sklar's in particular, furthermore brings the woman and her work alive. Between 1899 and 1931 alone she produced more than 300 articles.[29]

8 Concluding remarks

As Kelley was positioned in-between different worlds, which she had to try to reconcile, it seems almost inevitable that she would be attacked from all sides. She was also between classes: Born into a well-established activist family, she was a well-educated woman of the better-off classes. However, her father had been an orphan and child labourer, as she recounts in her autobiography, and a defender of working-class rights (Sklar [Kelley] 1986: 27ff., 36f., 39, 61). At least since moving to Hull House in late 1891, she had earned her own living, if from a better position than the ordinary American woman. Nonetheless, she had to borrow money at times, lacked a secure income as

29 On the NCL collection and Kelley's writings, see Sklar/Palmer (2009: xxviii). Their annotated edition and Sklar's *Nation's Work* offer the best summaries of primary sources about Kelley.

her writing was paid in piece-work, and had debts until her children had finished college. She was, secondly, in-between worlds because she was an American who travelled to Europe, married a Russian Jew, lived and worked with immigrants from various backgrounds, and participated in transnational congresses such as the women's peace congresses in post World War I. While this was a strength – intellectually and for her international advocacy networks (many reformers were immigrants) – this transnationalism was used to attack her and question her patriotism during the 1920s red-scare attacks. Lastly, as a strong, determined leader and an uncompromising and critical person, she was feared by her own friends and colleagues. Yet without her fierce determination, as revealed by Du Bois, she may have never achieved what she did.

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