

A LWV representative appeared before the Board of Supervisors requesting once more that they authorize the appointment of a case work supervisor for the county probation department. They recommended that the position be filled by a person having the qualifications set forth by the Council of N. Y. State Probation Administrators, and that an adequate salary be offered.

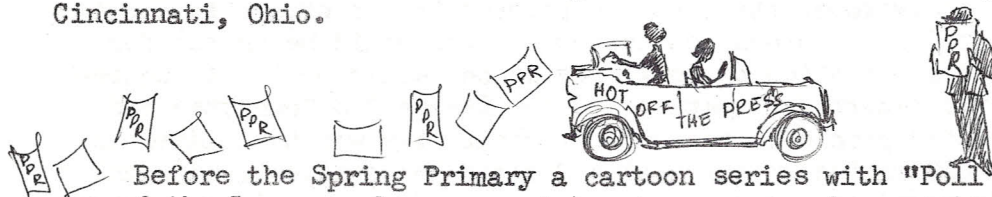
Letters were sent again urging the appointment of a qualified, non-partisan City Manager.

National League "Calls to Action" kept League members writing to congressmen to support the United Nations, the North Atlantic Pact, Point Four Technical Assistance, European Recovery Plan and military aid to NATO countries. The expansion of world trade, the federal budget, defense and inflation, and mutual security were national problems studied by the local League.

When the time came to send in recommendations for National League Program, a Board meeting open to the membership was held, a new idea which has become standard procedure.

Workshops were held to study and discuss the primary system in New York State, to find ways of improving the method of choosing party and public officials, and ways of stimulating citizen interest in the primaries. Because '52 was a presidential election year, presidential nominating methods were stressed, and League teams went out on street interviews to determine what the individual voter knew about the primary.

The Schenectady League participated, with the Albany and Troy Leagues, in one of the many forums set up across the United States as a national voter service project called "Citizens View of '52." These forums determined the issues which were discussed later by candidates for president, speaking to a nationwide audience from the League's national Convention platform in Cincinnati, Ohio.

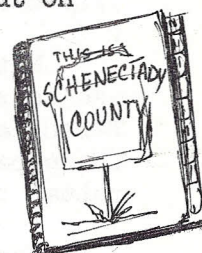


Before the Spring Primary a cartoon series with "Poll Parrot" drawn by one of the League gals appeared in newspapers and on posters urging people to enroll in their party and to register and vote. An antique mimeograph machine in an open car was driven through the streets printing flyers on PPR and the Primary which were given away "hot off the press." A Voters Council was set up in the community combining the efforts of the LWV, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Adult Education Department and the Rotary Club, in a campaign to get out the vote. The Chamber of Commerce and the League office telephones were staffed to provide voter information. A master notebook was compiled setting up a system for locating election districts and polling places when given a person's street and house number.

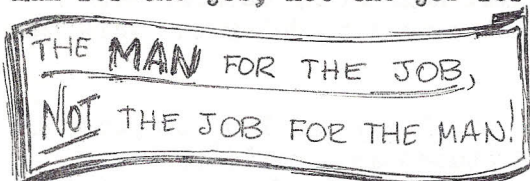


Further discussion and study of the New York Primary laws led the Schenectady League to the conclusion that it should support a presidential preferential primary. This was reported to the state League since this was a state program item. Schenectady also contributed to the compilation of information on all primary systems throughout the United States, which was later published and placed in libraries and schools. This was the first time that such a nationwide report had been available. League members also discovered that improvement in primary election procedures depends not only on knowledge of the law but on understanding of political party organization and practical politics.

The booklet "You are Entering Schenectady County" was completed in 1953, following a two-year survey as planned. It was an attractive, factual and readable little book, containing a wealth of information not found in any other one publication. Two thousand copies were printed and used by the General Electric Company, schools, civic groups and individuals.



One outcome of the survey of county functions and services, for the booklet, was the decision to make "Civil Service Study" the 1953-54 local current agenda. Since 1934 when the local League took part in the national campaign to substitute the merit system for the old spoils system, as a means of staffing government with qualified people, the Schenectady Board had urged the selection of "the man for the job, not the job for the man." In 1953 Civil Service Committee



led members in a study of the civil service law, and the problems involved in its administration and operation in Schenectady county. Criteria for the selection of Commissioners of Civil Service were determined and sent to the Board of Supervisors

to remind them of their responsibility in this area. Continuing their pressure through letters of the newspapers, talks with public officials, and appearances before the Board of Supervisors, the League persisted in its effort to obtain a case work supervisor for the probation department who would be chosen for merit, and without the restriction of local residence requirement. A comprehensive and informative report was compiled by the League C S Committee and distributed to interested people in the county. This item was then added to the continuing responsibilities on the League Program to be acted upon whenever the situation demanded it.

In the fall of 1953 the idea of having a Candidates Meeting in each of the three large towns was tried. Each candidate for Supervisor spoke about the job as he envisioned it. Attendance was low, and after this interviews with candidates on television and radio took the place of meetings in public halls. It was felt that more people were reached in this way, with much less work. One newspaper printed a full page map of the city election districts with a list of the polling places, while the other paper gave explanations of the amendments that were to be voted on. Committeemen from both parties were invited to League Unit meetings to answer questions on practical politics. People were encouraged to find out who the committeemen were in their election district, since they are one's nearest contact with the political party.



The Schenectady League joined the Mohawk Hudson Council for Educational Television when it was first established. Sharing time with the Albany League, and with the help of the Orange County Community College, they presented a series of programs on basic citizenship education. Two of the thirteen programs were prepared and presented by Schenectady alone, one "Jets, Vets and Debts" and the other on "How Everyone is Affected by State Legislation."

Working to improve the primary system (a state item) the League supported legislation to grant the optional use of voting machines in primary elections, and two bills to simplify paper ballots when they are used.

Face to face with reality in its own operation the Schenectady League raised dues to five dollars a year at the 1954 annual meeting, making it possible to spend more for its operating expenses and for "Action in the Community."

Interest in education, never far in the background of League minds, was put on active agenda for 1954-55, as a study of school systems in Schenectady County. The item was limited to structure of districts, State Education Law, financing, facilities and School Boards. The results of this year's work was:

1. Members were brought up to date about schools in the whole county.
2. Duties, responsibilities and the qualifications of school board members were investigated and listed. The qualifications were publicized to arouse public interest in the candidates for school boards.
3. School elections in May became part of the Voter Service work of the League.
4. It was concluded that since education is regulated in great part by state law any effective action must be taken on the state level. Schenectady therefore supported the proposal that "Education" be adopted as a state League program item. This was done in 1959.

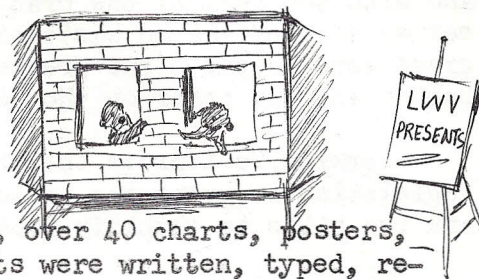
When the city Board of Education presented a special referendum to the voters in June '54, the League offered to staff their office to aid voters in finding polling places and to provide other information. The Board of Education then added the school election districts and polling places to the League's street directory for general elections, and reprinted the entire directory for use by both the League and city schools. This book was a great improvement and enabled the League to give better service to the public for both general and school elections.

For Voters Service League members distributed kits in a neighborhood door-bell ringing campaign over a large area. Besides a four-page "Facts for Voters" the kit contained the qualifications for voting, a list of the candidates with their biographies, a summary of the PPR law and an outline of the pros and cons of appointed versus elected school board. The latter question was to be voted upon by city voters. Over 4500 "Facts" were given out and the Chamber of Commerce and other civic groups bought 2400 more. Two delegates to the State Conventions of the political parties were interviewed on TV by a League member, to arouse public interest in party procedures.



The presentation of school board candidates on television with a League person as moderator, was another service which the League began, and has continued for several years.

For the second year the Schenectady LWV joined the Mohawk Hudson Council on Educational Television and in a series of half hour programs produced a puppet show extraordinaire - on of all subjects: United States Trade Policies!!! Scenery, puppets, over 40 charts, posters, cartoons and other visual aids were made. Scripts were written, typed, rehearsed and acted by League women. The program was amazingly effective, both in presentation and in factual information that it got across to the public. Complimentary response to it came from the farthest limits of the viewing area. A Local Trade Survey was also made by the League, as part of a nationwide project. The purpose was to stimulate interest in foreign trade and to gain information about the specific effects of imports and exports on the local economy. Local businessmen in sixteen firms were interviewed and the results sent to the national League where reports from local Leagues all over the U. S. were coordinated and made into a national publication, another example of the unique kind of public service done by the League of Women Voters.



At this time the possibility arose that the Executive Officer of the Civil Service Commission might retire and an appointment would be made. Under the Continuing Responsibility of Civil Service, the League Board authorized a committee to write letters to the responsible officials stating the League's recommendations for the qualifications, and the method of selecting, his successor. The public was also informed by letters to the editors of the newspapers.

Under the National League Program of 1956-57, the basis rights guaranteed to individuals by the U. S. constitution and their relationship to national security, were seriously studied and discussed. A series of booklets were used for background information. These were published by the Freedom Agenda Committee of the Carrie Chapman Catt Memorial Fund, Inc., a research and educational fund created by the League of Women Voters of the United States. The Freedom Agenda Program was made possible by a grant from the Fund for the Republic. The program was dedicated to the better understanding by the American people of the fundamental principles of individual liberty, and the role that basic rights play in the maintenance of our system of constitutional democracy.

Student Conferences were held each spring at Union College, co-sponsored by the League and the International Relations Club of the college. Current international issues were presented, with background information by League members and college people, as resource persons. Discussion, and questions and answers followed, under the leadership of professors and League persons. The LWV withdrew its sponsorship of the conferences in 1954 because the Board felt that the League's policy of presenting both sides of the issue, in discussion groups, was not being followed.



In the legislative session of 1954 PPR was finally passed on a county optional basis. This League baby, while certainly not premature, was not the lusty infant that had been hoped for. Amendments were needed, counties had to be urged to adopt the system, and the League believed that PPR should be statewide and mandatory. The League's own PPR bill had been introduced in the legislature in 1940, and after all these years it did not propose to give up with only half the battle won.

It was the natural reaction of the Schenectady League to make the "Adoption of PPR in Schenectady" their current agenda at the next annual meeting. (1955) They had asked the Board of Supervisors to make a study of the system and to become acquainted with the law so that the cost of operation under PPR and the amount of equipment needed might be determined. The Elections and Judiciary Committee of the Board of Supervisors and League representatives began meeting in March and continued at least once a month through the summer and fall. While others sat in the sun or went fishing, these good citizens pondered the PPR law, met with equipment salesmen, and studied facts and figures. By September they had agreed to ask the Board of Supervisors to budget money to set up the PPR system of registration, and to enact the local law to put it into effect. League representatives attended meetings of the finance committee and the president made statements at public hearings of the Board of Supervisors to support this decision. The night that the local PPR law was passed the Supervisor's meeting room was packed with jubilant Leaguers. Schenectady became the third county in New York to modernize its registration procedures. Under the new system every voter in Schenectady county was required to re-register before the November 1956 elections. Central Registration at the Election Commissioner's Offices beginning May 1, a provision of the law to allow people to register during the summer, was the focus of League activity. The Voter Service Committee working with the Board of Elections and political parties, and using the press, radio and television, kept the idea before the public. Daily notices explained the law and urged voters to get registered early. A mile of footprints leading to the office for Central Registration was

painted on State Street by League and Junior Chamber of Commerce workers, as a publicity stunt. At the end of central registration in September about one-fourth of the eligible voters had registered; at the end of local registration days in October a record number were qualified to vote and, to top it off, final figures showed that about 98% of those registered had voted. At the 1956 annual meeting the League put PPR on its list of continuing responsibilities and assumed a "watchdog" attitude to follow its administration from then on. It has urged the Election Commissioners to consolidate election districts for registration, since fewer voters need to register each year under PPR, and the opening of all election districts is an unwarranted expense.

In March of '56 a luncheon was given at Hotel Van Curler to honor past League presidents. A program highlighting the history of the Schenectady League was presented with humor, sympathy, and appreciation for all the work done by past League officers. It was a happy occasion bringing together long time faithful members and enthusiastic newer ones.



Now following the example of national and state League Boards, Schenectady reviewed its program, revised its by-laws and examined its continuing responsibilities. Years had gone by since some of these items had been studied and many members lacked background information on them. It was hard for those who remembered the hard work of the past to agree that old program items should be dropped. It was more important however, that all League members should be informed and in agreement, so that League action would be effective in the community. So four items were listed as continuing responsibilities and were adopted as authority for League action, at the annual meeting. In brief these were: to support the appointment of qualified personnel in government positions, under the merit system; to support the efficient administration of PPR; to support the appointment of a professionally trained, non-partisan City Manager; to encourage the selection of highly qualified candidates for all school boards in the county.

As current agenda the study of "Optional Forms of County Government" was chosen. If there is one theme that persists through all the work of the Schenectady League it is "improvement of county government." It began in the 1930's and is not accomplished in 1960. Many League committees have studied it and reached the same conclusions but even with the support of other public spirited groups, the strength of embedded political forces, and the lethargy of the people, have resisted any great change in the county "way of doing." Permissive legislation passed in 1952 gave counties a choice of improved forms of government, but they did not seem to fit the needs in Schenectady. County Government continued on active program until 1960 when the decision was made that the only way to get what the League considered a responsive county government would be to write a charter themselves. This became the 1961 program item: to write a Home Rule Charter, which would provide for a County Executive; strengthened lines of responsibility and equitable representation on the Board of Supervisors.

The League booklet "YOU ARE ENTERING Schenectady County" was brought up to date and reprinted in 1956. This time 4000 copies were printed and although some were given away, the majority were sold, and the League enjoyed a small profit. This followed by a successful finance drive put the Board in a position of being able to budget a few extras. After years of penny-pinching, this was hard to believe. A new mimeograph machine was their first purchase, but most of the extra money was added to Voter Service Department to broaden its area of activity. By 1960 the number of "Facts for Voters" purchased from the State League and given away at election time had risen to 15,000; 25,000 more were purchased and distributed by local businessmen and Chamber of Commerce. Also a local Voters Guide was compiled about candidates and other voting information; 5,000 were given away and General Electric Co. was granted permission to print 6,000 more. Information on school board candidates for all districts in the area, plus all the usual pre-election services had become a regular part of League work in May. Interviews with candidates on TV and radio by League leaders was expected by the public.