



Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965 (Gender and American Culture)

Annelise Orleck

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Common Sense and a Little Fire traces the personal and public lives of four immigrant women activists who left a lasting imprint on American politics. Though they have rarely had more than cameo appearances in previous histories, Rose Schneiderman, Fannia Cohn, Clara Lemlich Shavelson, and Pauline Newman played important roles in the emergence of organized labor, the New Deal welfare state, adult education, and the modern women's movement. Orleck takes her four subjects from turbulent, turn-of-the-century Eastern Europe to the radical ferment of New York's Lower East Side and the gaslit tenements where young workers studied together. Drawing from the women's writings and speeches, she paints a compelling picture of housewives' food and rent protests, of grim conditions in the garment shops, of factory-floor friendships that laid the basis for a mass uprising of young women garment workers, and of the impassioned rallies working women organized for suffrage. From that era of rebellion, Orleck charts the rise of a distinctly working-class feminism that fueled poor women's activism and shaped government labor, tenant, and consumer policies through the early 1950s.

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