

VCF Watsonville - General 1990 - RP 9/20/91 p.1

Women's peace group starts first bilingual branch here

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A branch of the 76-year-old Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has been formed in Watsonville.

It is the nation's first bilingual branch, representatives of the league said at a press conference at La Manzana center yesterday.

Maria Brough, chairwoman of the Watsonville branch, said slightly less than half of the branch's 25 members are Spanish speakers. Many of them, she said, are displaced Green Giant workers, who were unable to attend the press conference because they were in retraining classes.

Pat Arnold, co-chairwoman of the Santa Cruz branch, said Pajaro Valley residents have been members of the Santa Cruz branch of the league for many years, and that more South County residents have been joining of late. It was decided, she said, that Watsonville should have its own branch.

"We wanted to involve Hispanics more," Brough said.

"We're entering a new phase internationally," said Patt Taylor, co-chair of the Watsonville branch. "It's important (for Anglos and Latinos) to start working together... and to have a branch that speaks to both English- and Span-

ish-speakers."

The league began in 1915, when more than 1,000 women from 12 countries, many of them active in women's suffrage movements, assembled in The Hague in opposition to World War I. Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman Catt were among its earliest members.

The league continues to involve itself with national and international issues of peace and social justice.

During the Gulf War, for example, the Santa Cruz branch set up educational tables with information and literature protesting the war. It also took out ads in

local newspapers opposing the war. Generally speaking, the league does not involve itself with purely local issues, and, being non-partisan, does not get involved in electoral politics.

Two meetings have been held by the Watsonville branch and some of the area members want to work on have been tentatively identified, Taylor said. Support for the laid-off Green Giant workers is one, and a fund-raiser planned for Sept. 26 — a dinner and talk — will benefit both the Trabajadores Desplazados (an organization of laid-off workers) and the new branch.

The workers will cook a Mexican meal for the event. The talk will be given by Cecilia Zarate-Laun, a national league leader from Colombia, on democracy in South America. It will be held at the Watsonville Community Center (Marinovich Park) at 6 p.m.

Karen Osmundson, a member of the Watsonville branch, said involvement with the Green Giant workers will also mean work on the issue of free trade with Mexico, which is expected to have a negative impact on agricultural workers in the United States, and, some say, in Mexico as well. One of the league's advantages, she said, is that it is international, and

the Watsonville group can work with branches in Mexico and Latin America.

Other areas will most likely include education about the "500 years of exploitation," as Arnold put it, since the "discovery" of America by Christopher Columbus, timed to coincide with celebrations of the event, and the "peace economy" — or the money that should be available for domestic purposes with the end of enmity between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Further information about the Sept. 26 event is available by calling 728-8824 or 724-2778.