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Toward Collective Liberation: The Rise and Fall of Anti-Sweatshop Activism in the United States

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ABSTRACT
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This dissertation examines the ebb and flow between the purveyors of sweatshops and their activist opponents. I identify three different moments in the 20th century when activists succeeded in creating a mainstream movement to fight for worker justice by applying pressure to industry, consumers, and lawmakers. During the late Progressive Era, Great Depression, and neoliberal era, cross-class alliances formed to challenge capital's desire to maximize their profits. The solidarity demonstrated by these alliances provides important examples of the power that consumers hold when using market-based activism against business interests.

By examining the solidarity movements and their subsequent backlash, I aim to provide insight into the constant struggle over sweatshops in which business elites and activists tried to outwit each other. My research focuses on the activism of the National Consumers' League, Women's Trade Union League, League of Women Shoppers, Sweatshop Watch, National Labor Committee, and United Students Against Sweatshops. These groups used their members' privileges to support workers during labor disputes, establish labor laws and independent monitoring of workplaces, and to influence consumers to make ethical purchasing

decisions. While sweatshops never disappeared during the 20th century, activists achieved tangible gains that challenged capital's autonomy and profits. Industry, government, and the courts responded by colluding to repress dissenting voices and find new environments where sweatshops could thrive. The solidarity activism examined here offers important examples of cross-class alliances between the most vulnerable workers and members of the self-described "comfortable class," who used their privilege to highlight workers' actions by shining a light on the harshest elements of industrial capitalism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Organizations and Agencies

Alabama Child Labor Committee (ACLC)

American Federation of Labor (AFL)

Communist Party USA (CPUSA)

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)

Consumers Union (CU)

Consumers' Research (CR)

Department of Labor (DOL)

Domestic Workers Union (DWU)

Fair Labor Association (FLA)

General Accounting Office (GAO)

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)

League of Women Shoppers (LWS)

National Child Labor Committee (NCLC)

National Consumers' League (NCL)

National Labor Committee (NLC)

National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA)

Union of Needle-trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE)

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS)

Women's Trade Union League (WTUL)

Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)

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INTRODUCTION

At seven o'clock we all sit down to our machines and the boss brings to each one the pile of work that he or she is to finish during the day…Sometimes in my haste I get my finger caught and the needle goes right through it. It goes so quick, though, that it does not hurt much. I bind the finger up with a piece of cotton and go on working. We all have accidents like that.[1]

The labor conditions at the Appalachian Cotton Mills here are worse than miserable—they are no less than slavery. The mill has only two shifts, day and night shifts, and each of them 10 hours long. The scale of wages is very low, and the mill is a veritable sweatshop.[2]

[I] worked every day for 18 hours hunched over a sewing machine and then would go to sleep -- among the "rats, cockroaches, flies and lice"…There were security guards and barbed wire. We were controlled all the time. It was completely unexpected because my dream was that the United States would be a free country.[3]

These are the stories of three different women who worked in American sweatshops during the 20th century. The first account is from an early 1900s New York garment factory, the second is from a Tennessee textile mill in the 1930s, and the third is from a woman enslaved in a Los Angeles garment factory in the 1990s. Each account represents a specific moment with different socially and legally accepted standards for workers. However, the experiences of these women are disturbingly similar. As American industry became increasingly mobile over the course of the last century, sweatshop conditions moved with it. Capital relocated and profits skyrocketed, but conditions remained abusive for the most vulnerable workers. In some cases, despite the creation of labor laws and regulatory agencies,

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[1] Leon Stein, ed., *Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy* (New York: Quadrangle/New Times Book Company, 1977), pp. 60-61.
[2] Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Slaves of the Depression: Workers' Letters about Life on the Job*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 76–80.
[3] Emily Bristol, "On Human Bondage," *Las Vegas City Life*, 14 April 2005.

working conditions deteriorated to even longer hours, poorer pay, and more overt discrimination directed at women and workers of color.

The term "sweatshop" elicits an instinctive feeling of revulsion due to its historical connection to workplace danger and exploitation. Historians frequently connect the term to cramped tenements, oppressive temperatures, childhood labor, and diseased air.[4] Feminist scholars often focus on the gender-specific natures of sweatshops, linking them to sexual harassment and assault; forced birth control, sterilizations, and abortions; and decreased maternal health.[5] The American media has recently associated the term with the recent outbreak of suicides in massive electronics factories due to long hours, low pay, and extreme stress.[6] The sweatshop is a combination of each of these conditions.

The term originated as a social criticism of mid-19th century conditions in London's garment industry.[7] In 1850, English priest and history professor Charles Kingsley defined "sweated" laborers as those who subcontracted their labor by the piece. In this labor relationship, a "sweater" paid workers a set price for each piece they produced, typically in small shops or in their own homes. By the late 19th century, the British Parliament framed "sweating" as "1) an unduly low rate of wages, 2) excessive hours of labour, 3) the insanitary state of the houses in which

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[4] Daniel E. Bender, *Sweated Work, Weak Bodies: Anti-Sweatshop Campaigns and Languages of Labor (*New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
[5] Ann Cudd and Nancy Holmstrom, *Capitalism, For and Against: A Feminist Debate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ethel Carolyn Brooks, *Unraveling the Garment Industry: Transnational Organizing and Women's Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
[6] "A Trip to The iFactory: 'Nightline' Gets an Unprecedented Glimpse Inside Apple's Chinese Core," *ABC News,* 20 February 2012; "Suicides at Foxconn," *The Economist*, May 27, 2010; Charles Duhigg and David Barboza, "Human Costs Are Built Into an iPad," *New York Times*, January 25, 2012; David Barboza, "Foxconn Plans to Lift Pay Sharply at Factories in China," *New York Times*, February 18, 2012.
[7] Charles Kingsley, *Cheap Clothes and Nasty* (London: W. Pickering, 1950).

the work is carried on."[8] The conditions experienced by American garment workers mirrored those in England. Because of the scrutiny of reform-minded activists and officials, the industry quickly became an icon of the sweatshop in Great Britain and the United States.

Scholars have long focused on the apparel industries as some of the most dangerous and notorious examples of sweated labor.[9] Because it required minimal capital investment or infrastructure, apparel production served as an access point for countries and regions hoping to industrialize. Additionally, factory owners could maximize their profits by paying exceptionally low wages, as the apparel industries primarily employed women and teenagers. The garment industry regularly utilized a contract system in which the retail distributor rarely or never interacted directly with the workers who produced the goods. Instead a manufacturer would bid on a contract with a retailer and then forced workers to meet the terms of the agreement, often requiring excessively long hours to meet the demands.

While many history textbooks use the term "sweatshop" exclusively to describe conditions in 19th and 20th century garment factories, workers and activists have long argued that the sweatshop existed in many forms. Key scholars have argued that the practice of labor exploitation is vast, and the term cannot be restricted to a certain era, industry, or region. Book titles like *Sweatshops in the Sun, Sweatshops at Sea, Suburban Sweatshops, Electronic Sweatshop,* and *White-Collar Sweatshop* provide examples of occupations that used sweated labor to produce

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[8] Select Committee on the Sweating System, *House of Commons Papers* 17 (1890), p. exxxiv.
[9] Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Jane L. Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

goods or services.[10] These scholars have expanded the boundaries of the academic usage of the term "sweatshop" to include agricultural, domestic, and office workers; merchant seamen; and electronics manufacturers. An inclusive definition of the term is important and useful because it connects workers and conditions across borders, centuries, and industries. Historian Leon Stein writes, "The sweatshop is a state of mind as well as a physical fact…the sweatshop, whether in a modern factory building or a dark slum cellar, exists where the employer controls most of the working conditions and the worker cannot protest."[11] Developing the term's use beyond a specific period and region not only highlights brutal conditions in other industries, it also provides workers and activists with a valuable tool.

The federal government acknowledges a broad application of the term as well. The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) defines a sweatshop as "an employer that violates more than one federal or state law governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers compensation, or industry regulation."[12] While this definition does not account for the existence of sweatshops prior to or outside of U.S. labor laws and regulation, it does establish a clear standard that was repeatedly violated by many workplaces throughout the 1900s. This definition is especially important for the legal recourse

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[10] Ronald B. Taylor, *Sweatshops in the Sun: Child Labor on the Farm* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry, from 1812 to the Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Jennifer Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Barbara Garson, *The Electronic* Sweatshop*: How Computers Are Transforming the Office of the Future into the Factory of the Past* (New York: Penguin, 1988); Jill Andresky Fraser, *White-Collar Sweatshop* (London: Norton, 2001).

[11] Stein, *Out of the Sweatshop,* p. xv.

[12] United States General Accounting Office, *Efforts to Address the Prevalence and Conditions of Sweatshops: Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer and Monetary Affairs, Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives*, November 1994.

that it currently gives workers and their allies, but sweatshops existed, and continue to exist, outside of its boundaries. In my dissertation, I will consider the more subjective meaning that workers, unions, and activists used over the last century.

Across industries, borders, and decades, the term represented exploitation, marginalization, misery, unfulfilled hope, danger, and lack of opportunity. At different moments, the industrial elite and their allies have denied the existence of sweatshops, justified their reliance on sweatshops, and praised the creation of sweatshops. Sweated workplaces existed and thrived throughout the 20th century. They never disappeared, but were in a constant state of reinvention as industry continually sought to maximize profits.

However, there were significant moments in the 20th century when sweatshop workers and activists engaged in collective and individual action that challenged the idea that profit was more important than people. They forced consumers to acknowledge and confront their relationship to low wages, long hours, and dangerous work environments, and they offered alternatives for those who wished to become allies in the fight against worker exploitation. By encouraging consumers to use their purchasing power in solidarity with workers, progressive activists attempted to "civilize capitalism,"[13] fighting for lower hours, higher wages, and union recognition for workers; protection for female employees; and access to racial, gender, and sexual equality.[14]

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[13] Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
[14] Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

My dissertation examines three major American consumer-driven, anti-sweatshop movements that took place in the 20th century and the subsequent reaction of business elites who adapted their profit-earning strategies in response to the political and social changes for which activists and workers had lobbied. Tapping into broader social, economic, and cultural critiques, anti-sweatshop activists participated in the Progressive Era in the 1910s, the Popular Front in the 1930s, and global justice movement in the 1990s worked to establish cultures of ethical consumption. During these three moments, activists succeeded in creating mainstream movements to fight for worker justice by applying pressure to industry, consumers, and lawmakers. My project, which was born out of my own experiences as an anti-sweatshop activist during graduate school, places the solidarity activism of allies within broader justice movements. Solidarity from middle-class and elite activists maximized the options available to worker and activists, which led to concrete reforms. I examine the solidarity activism of workers' allies who used their privilege to act in concert with some of the most marginalized American workers of the 20th century. Their actions offer important examples of cross-class alliances between vulnerable workers and members of the self-described "comfortable class," who together shined a light on the harshest elements of industrial capitalism.[15]

Though they achieved a number of reforms, activists also experienced swift and severe backlash as industry leaders and political allies used friendly legal climates in their efforts to preserve as much of a free and unregulated industrial

[15] The president of the Chicago League of Women Shoppers used this term to describe the group's members. League of Women Shoppers, "League of Women Shoppers Pamphlet," 1937. Jessie Lloyd O'Conner Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA (hereafter referred to as O'Connor Papers).

landscape as possible. Capital responses to reform movements continually forced anti-sweatshop activists to return to the margins of society. Business and political elites used two Red Scares in the 20th century to repress individuals and organizations that agitated for more humane industrial relationships. Furthermore, even during periods of economic prosperity and increased regulation from the state, sweatshops continued. When regulation led to higher labor costs and decreased authority for employers, capital flight allowed sweatshops to emerge across regional and national borders. As industry shifted production from the North to the American South, and then to the Global South over the course of the 20th century, it brought with it grueling working conditions, minimal pay, and a political climate more favorable to industry than to workers and their rights.[16] My dissertation examines the ebb and flow between the purveyors of sweatshops and their activist opponents over the course of the 20th century. Each group was forced to remain vigilant and innovative as they sought to outmaneuver the other group's efforts to create landscapes that either brought reform to sweatshops or ensured that they could thrive.

Chapter One explores the relationships between workers and the activists of the National Consumers' League (NCL) and the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) during the late Progressive Era. These groups included lifelong consumer and labor activists Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Francis Perkins, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Rose Schneiderman during a time when women were only beginning

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[16] Beth Anne English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, And Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Francis Robert Shor, *Dying Empire: U.S. Imperialism and Global Resistance* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010).

to emerge as public figures and professionals. The NCL and WTUL both offered support to sweatshop workers during massive strikes that took place in Chicago and New York from 1909 to 1911 and during the tragic, and preventable, 1911 Triangle Fire. With memberships that included their impoverished sweatshop workers and elite socialites, these organizations formed some of the earliest examples of solidarity that produced a cross-class anti-sweatshop movement in the United States. Deriving strength both from their relative privilege and their practical understanding of workplace realities, they organized strike relief funds, picket line support, and soup lines to feed striking workers. They also agitated for worker-friendly labor policies and workplace protections.

Chapter Two traces capital's response to workers and activists' Progressive Era achievements. Industry leaders allied with like-minded politicians to dismantle and evade labor laws, crush unions and weaken the thrust of organized labor more broadly, and stigmatize worker justice activism as a threat to national security. Elected officials and judges worked on behalf of business interests during the period to widen the income gap, suppress organized labor, evade and dismantle labor laws, and restrict child labor legislation. The First Red Scare allowed the state to repress working-class interests and radical activists through the threat of deportation or a prison sentence. A conservative Supreme Court continually ruled pro-worker legislation unconstitutional. Southern states competed with each other to court capital flight by promising the cheapest, most pliable labor with the fewest regulations. By utilizing of all of their resources, American elites established the 1920s as a reemergence of the Gilded Age.

Chapter Three identifies the 20th century's second major anti-sweatshop movement. I highlight the Popular Front organization the League of Women Shoppers (LWS) as an example unique to Depression Era activism. During the 1930s, the Popular Front, a coalition made up of many left-leaning students, union organizers, civil rights activists, artists, writers, clergy, workers, and consumers, fought for better working conditions and challenged white supremacy. The LWS was an active member of this justice movement. Through its slogan, "Use your buying power for justice," the LWS mobilized middle-class and wealthy women as socially active consumers, reaching a membership of 25,000. Their solidarity with workers was both their mission and their undoing, however, as they were later targeted by former foes, including Walt Disney, for their participation in cross-class alliances that proved costly to employers.

Chapter Four documents the suppression of the LWS and other activist groups during the early years of the Second Red Scare from the late 1930s through the 1940s. Elite businessmen like William Randolph Hearst worked with conservative, anti-New Deal officials like Martin Dies to dismantle the powerful coalition of left-leaning organizations and policy makers, many of whom had risen from the ranks of Progressive Era reform groups to key roles in the New Deal establishment. Linking solidarity activism with Communism and creating a narrative in which Communism was a dangerous threat to the nation, Hearst, Dies, and their allies subdued those who dared to threaten their profits and power. Taking advantage of the political climate, professional anticommunists developed careers pushing American culture further to the right by providing paid testimony

and creating conservative alternative media outlets and think tanks. As their predecessors had done during the 1920s, business interests forced consumer and labor activists back to the margins of society.

As working conditions improved after the New Deal and World War II, the sweatshops of the early 20th century shrank to represent only a marginal fraction of industry. Chapter Five examines the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on the relationship between the state, corporations, and workers at home and abroad during the last decades of the 20th century when sweatshops reemerged with a vengeance. Political and industrial elites redesigned the economic landscape to functionally create new environments where sweatshops could thrive. Officials from both political parties sought to undo or minimize the effects of New Deal and Great Society legislation that provided a safety net and important regulation to protect American workers. At the same time, the state worked on behalf of business interests to expand trade over national borders, resulting in the loss of American manufacturing and the increased reliance on sweatshop labor to New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, as well as the ubiquitous importation of products made with sweated labor in the Global South. Those sympathetic to workers had their hands tied since regulatory agencies and government departments had been weakened through decades of budget cuts and mismanagement. Corporations also began to rely increasingly on athletes, film and television stars, and media personalities to serve as brand ambassadors for their products, encouraging consumers to focus their attention on cultural icons rather than the means by which highly coveted consumer goods were produced.

Chapter Six identifies the 1990s as a third period of American anti-sweatshop activism. During this decade activists fought many of the same challenges as in previous eras, but adapted to a new landscape. Contesting an increasingly mobile and global sweatshop industry, the National Labor Committee, Sweatshop Watch, and United Students Against Sweatshops utilized powerful, mainstream institutions like the media and the justice system. These organizations fought against sweatshop owners in court and wrote laws that would hold corporations accountable for conditions in the their subcontractors' factories. They also used brand name recognition to force child labor back into the public's popular awareness. Student activists pressured universities to demand independent monitoring for factories producing apparel donning school logos. As parts of a larger anti-globalization, pro-worker, and pro-environment movement taking place at the turn of the century, these activists forced the means of production back to the forefront.

The back and forth between political and economic elites and workers and activists has continued into the 21st century. In November 2011, leading Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich referred to child labor laws as "truly stupid" during an appearance at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Gingrich proposed eliminating child labor laws so that children as young as nine could replace unionized janitors as custodians at their own schools. When asked to clarify his position during a campaign stop in Iowa, Gingrich said, "Really poor children in really poor neighborhoods have no habits of working and nobody

around them who works."[17] A few months later, Sarah Palin, the Republican nominee for Vice President in 2008, attacked the United States Department of Labor's plan to update the Fair Labor Standards Act to regulate child labor on non-family-owned farms. The new standards sought to protect young agricultural workers by regulating jobs that can be dangerous, such as working with animals, manure, and pesticides. Palin attacked the Obama administration for intruding into private matters, writing, "Federal government: get your own house in order and stop interfering in ours."[18] Meanwhile, Missouri Republican State Senator Jane Cunningham sponsored a bill gutting her state's child labor regulations calling them "big government telling parents how to raise their children."[19] Child labor, once thought to represent a bygone era within American society, has been reintroduced to the political arena by the American Right as an antidote to modern families' supposed reliance on government handouts. Child labor serves as one of the most visible symbols of the sweatshop, an institution that has remained in the United States throughout the 20th century. I hope this examination of the rise and fall of American anti-sweatshop activism will demonstrate both the hopeful possibilities of solidarity activism as well as its limitations.

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[17] Paul West, "Newt Gingrich Expands on His Support for Child Labor," *Los Angeles Times,* 1 Dec 2011.
[18] Sarah Palin, "If I Wanted America to Fail, I'd Ban Kids From Farm Work," April 25, 2012. https://www.facebook.com/notes/sarah-palin/if-i-wanted-america-to-fail-id-ban-kids-from-farm-work/10150708641923435 (accessed on August 20, 2012).
[19] Cunningham is a member of American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a free-market advocacy group comprised of far Right officials, corporations, and foundations. ALEC, which raised close to $22 million from corporations in three years, writes business-friendly legislation for elected officials to propose. See Senate Bill No. 222 (http://www.senate.mo.gov/11info/pdf-bill/intro/SB222.pdf)

CHAPTER ONE

"Capital Can Commit No Crime when It Is in Pursuit of Profits": Activists Take On Sweatshops in the Progressive Era

In 1909, the Consumers' League of New York distributed 50,000 flyers and post cards to shoppers encouraging them to finish their Christmas shopping early.[1] Several years earlier, chapters of the National Consumers' League (NCL) around the country launched a campaign directed at female shoppers to refrain from waiting until the Christmas Eve or Christmas day to complete their shopping. The group publicized the hardships that department store clerks, mail carriers, delivery drivers and child employees, such as ten to fourteen-year-old "shop girls" and "errand boys," endured during the holiday season that could be alleviated by conscious consumers. Stores hired extra employees to help with the holiday rush, with even the youngest children working upwards of ninety-hour weeks in order to accommodate shoppers. The Buffalo and Columbus chapters produced cards and stamps with phrases like "An eleventh-hour shopper changes a merry Christmas to a weary Christmas" and "Your best Christmas gift will be shopping done before December 15."[2] In 1908, a student at Vassar College wrote an editorial for the school newspaper urging her classmates to conduct their shopping in an ethical and responsible manner to keep from adding to the "weariness and overwork without the compensating pleasures that we find."[3] In 1912, the NCL distributed its own version of the holiday classic, "The Night Before Christmas," linking the cruel

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[1] "Consumers' League Meets," *New York Times,* 27 January 1909; "Christmas Shopping Easier This Year," *New York Times,* 5 December 1909.
[2] Consumers' League of Buffalo, "To Christmas Shoppers," reel 113, National Consumers' League Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress Washington, D.C. (hereafter NCL Records); Consumers' League of Columbus, Christmas card, reel 13, NCL Records.
[3] "Christmas Shopping and the Consumers' League," *Vassar Miscellany* 37 (1908), p. 165.

conditions for workers with the consumption of the elite. The NCL's "The Week Before Christmas" began with:

> 'Twas the week before Christmas, and all through the town
> The shopgirls and packers were fast breaking down,
> While women of leisure lay soft in their beds,
> And visions of purchases danced in their heads.[4]

The group extended its reach when *Good Housekeeping* published a member's article in June 1908, giving its readership ample time to prepare for the holiday season.[5] The chapters worked closely with local merchants and store owners in order to offer incentives for shopping early. For example, several New York stores rewarded consumers who completed their shopping in November by not charging them until the following January. The NCL activists made ethical Christmas shopping a mainstream concern for non-political women and shifted the purchasing habits of generations of women.[6]

In this chapter, I will examine the efforts of the National Consumers' League and the Women's Trade Union League as they worked to combat American sweatshops. Formed at the turn of the 20th century, the groups' members were instrumental in mitigating the ruthlessness of early industrial capitalism. While the NCL focused on using consumers' power to pressure officials to regulate industries and eradicate the sweatshop, the WTUL supported female workers in labor disputes and union organizing efforts. The two groups often worked together as part of a broad coalition supporting worker justice. They engaged in solidarity activism

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[4] Margaret Chanler Aldrich, "The Week Before Christmas" (1912), reel 13, NCL Records.
[5] Mary Theiss, "The Consumers' League," *Good Housekeeping* 47 (July 1908), pp. 656-8.
[6] Julia Blanshard, "Consumers' League Works To Protect Children: Past Conditions Changed Greatly by Organization," *Miami News,* 18 November 1929.

during the massive garment worker strikes in the early 1900s and in the wake of the Triangle Fire. Students, professors, social workers, factory inspectors, factory workers, and elite socialites comprised the membership of the organizations, allowing their campaigns and causes entry to large populations of progressive-minded women.

For the members of the NCL and the WTUL, solidarity meant utilizing power derived from their socio-economic class, education, profession, and membership in a large organization in order to influence labor disputes, policy, and working families' lives during tragedies**.** Their power, albeit limited because of their gender and their overall critique of industrial capitalism, allowed them to soften the harsh injustices experienced by sweatshop workers in first two decades of the 20th century. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the two organizations were pioneers in some of the earliest forms of female cross-class anti-sweatshop activism in the United States.

The NCL formed in 1899 after several consumer groups in New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania affiliated. The organization's founding members were prominent middle-class progressive activists who were brought together at the behest of garment worker Leonora O'Reilly in 1888 at the New York Working Women's Society. The middle-class women, who went on to form the New York Consumers' League two years later, organized a committee to assist the Working Women's Society. They formed a committee to produce a "white list" of employers who treated their workers fairly, and they encouraged female consumers to consider the list when shopping.

The NCL grew quickly and included over sixty chapters by 1905. The organization chose "Investigate, Agitate, and Legislate" as its motto, reflecting the broader goal of the Progressive Era movement to improve conditions for the poor by exposing corruption and creating laws to protect the nation's citizenry. The national organization worked on "white label" campaign to certify goods that from clean factories with good working conditions. Chapters chose campaigns centered around "local conditions which seem to most demand their attention."[7] For example, when the Milwaukee Consumers' League (MCL) formed in 1900, the group focus on the local issue of Saturday half-holidays. After 500 members and allies pledged to refrain from shopping on Saturday afternoons, representatives from the MCL visited sixty-two stores to speak to managers who all promised compliance. Thousands of Milwaukee female clerks were able to enjoy Saturday holidays during the summer months, and other branches of the Consumers' League tried to emulate the campaign.[8]

Many of the members of the NCL were among the first generation of college-educated American women and served as pioneers of social work and reform. Florence Kelley, the NCL's first general secretary and its guiding force for thirty years, became a socialist during college, worked as a Chicago factory inspector, and lived at the Hull House and Henry Street Settlement Houses for most of her adult life. Kelley believed that everyone had the power to resist sweatshop conditions for workers. That power lay in the emerging role consumers would have to embrace in

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[7] "What Has the National Consumers' League Done for Saleswomen?" *New York Times,* 25 August 1901.
[8] Ibid.

a burgeoning consumer-based, industrial economy. Kelley coined a phrase that would become another early motto for the NCL, stating, "To live means to buy, to buy means to have power, to have power means to have responsibility."[9] Kelly and other members of the NCL led the movement against child labor, sweatshops, and dangerous living conditions.[10]

The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) formed in 1903 to unite wealthy, middle, and working-class women in struggles against sweatshops and labor exploitation and to push for women's participation in trade unions. A British WTUL had been established in the 1870s, and its supporters hoped to form a similar organization in the United States. Although created during an American Federation of Labor (AFL) convention, the WTUL received little support from the AFL due to its decision to prioritize skilled, male workers. Among its first members were Leonora O'Reilly and Jane Addams, who had also played roles in the formation of the NCL.

The WTUL's membership was open to anyone in support of helping women successfully organize and join unions. Reflecting the organization's desire to place its leadership in the hands of working-class women, its executive board was comprised of a majority of women trade unionists and a minority of allies, or

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[9] Sandra Opdycke, *Jane Addams and Her Vision* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2011), p. 159.
[10] For more on Florence Kelley and other early reformers, see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women`s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); John Louis Recchiuti, *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive-Era Reform in New York City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Peggy Pasco, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, editors. *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University of Press of Kentucky, 1991); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United State.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

"earnest sympathizers and workers for the cause of trade unionism."[11] The WTUL started with three branches in New York, Boston, and Chicago that grew out of close relationships with settlement houses. The WTUL expanded, primarily in the Northeast and Midwest, but the original three branches remained the strongest due to their proximity to large populations of organized female workers. The WTUL included leadership from both middle-class social workers like Margaret Dreier Robins, who became president of both the Chicago local and national WTUL in 1907, and trade unionists like cap-maker Rose Schneiderman, who left the sweatshop for a salaried position with the New York WTUL. The organization's dual commitment to feminist values and trade unionism set the WTUL apart from many other Progressive Era reform organizations.[12] It transcended class lines while it organizing female workers, lobbying for labor legislation, and providing educational programs to elicit support from middle-class women and male-dominated unions.

Lowell "Mill Girls"

While there was not a cross-class anti-sweatshop movement until the early 1900s, it is important to note that female workers began to protest their inhumane workplace conditions much earlier. Some of the first women to earn wages in the United States worked in the Lowell textile mills in Massachusetts. Several industrialists opened a textile mill in Lowell in the early 1820s, and by 1840 had

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[11] Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Frances Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 237.
[12] See Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Robin Miller Jacoby, "The Women's Trade Union League and American Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1975): pp. 126-140.

turned the town into a corporate mill city valued at over ten million dollars that employed and housed over 8,000 workers.[13]

The success of Lowell's elites drew praise from all over the world as a model for efficiency. In fact, the Lowell mills were integral to the American Industrial Revolution. The millhands, often referred to as "Lowell Mill Girls," worked upwards of seventy hours per week in noisy, poorly ventilated buildings and lived in austere conditions. In spite of their long hours, the millhands created and participated in an active intellectual culture with lectures, reading groups, and lending libraries. In the 1830s, they began publishing the *Lowell Offering*, a newsletter filled with their own poetry and prose. In addition to these creative works, which often included humorous topics, the millhands also wrote about the conditions within the mills. Harriet Farley, a millhand from New Hampshire who took responsibility for the *Lowell Offering* as editor and publisher, wrote a poem that dealt with the suicide of a two millhands. Farley connected the dehumanizing factory work with the milllhands' decision to take their own lives.

One more unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!
Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young and so fair!
Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her mournfully,
Gently and humanly;

[13] While there were men who worked in the Lowell Mills, over three-quarters of the millhands were women, mostly between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five.

Perishing gloomily,
Spurned by contumely,
Cold inhumanity,
Burning insanity,
Into her rest.[14]

The women also wrote about the importance of solidarity and organizing to reclaim control of their lives. In many ways the Lowell sweatshops served as radicalizing experience for many of the women who spent the bulk of their young adult lives within the factory (poorly constructed, poorly ventilated) walls.

Agents of the mill owners recruited many native-born American women to Lowell on the promise of a better life with greater independence, but failed to deliver. Once there, the millhands had very little autonomy because of the long workdays and strict rules within the boarding houses. In spite of these efforts to control the daily lives and bodies of the women, the "Lowell Mill Girls" organized some of the earliest large-scale labor disputes in American industry. By framing their working conditions as antithetical to American democracy, organizers appealed to a broad community of the residential workers. During the 1836 strike, or "turn out," over 1,500 mill workers walked out in protest of a wage cut.[15]

In 1845, the Lowell millhands formed an organization called the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (FLRA) to agitate for the ten-hour workday. The movement saw small reform quickly even though the textile mill owners held great influence over the Massachusetts legislature. One of the tactics used by the FLRA was to publish pro-worker propaganda in a newsletter titled, *Factory Tracts*. Many

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[14] Harriet Farley, "Editorial: Two Suicides," *Lowell Offering* IV, 1844.
[15] Thomas Dublin, "Women, Work, and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills: 'The Oppressing Hand of Avarice Would Enslave Us,'" *Labor History 16* (1975), pp. 99-116

of the writings referred to the factory system as slavery with so-called Christian philanthropists profiting off of the exploited labor of young women. One rather incendiary piece hints at the un-American nature of industrial capitalism.

> In the strength of our united influence we will soon show these *driveling* [emphasis in original] cotton lords, this mushroom aristocracy of New England, who so arrogantly aspire to lord it over God's heritage, that our rights cannot be trampled upon with impunity; that we WILL not longer submit to that arbitrary power which has for the last ten years been so abundantly exercised over us.[16]

While workers did not achieve a ten-hour workday until 1874, they had indeed made tangible gains before that year. The LFLR pressured the Lowell textile industry to reduce the workday to an eleven-hour day. This was a reduction of one hour per day, accomplished by textile workers with no access to electoral politics or economic power. The LFLR learned the importance of organizing both workers and the community by framing the female millhands as young and innocent and industry as harsh and oppressive. While Lowell certainly set the stage for labor unrest among wage-earning women, it was not until the early 1900s that workers and reformers protested factory conditions in large numbers.

New York at the Turn of the Century

A large wave of immigration during the late 19th century coincided with the Second Industrial Revolution, leaving few working class women with employment options except sweatshops. The garment industry primarily employed young female immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. By 1910, there were two million foreign-born residents in the United States which created tension due to the

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[16] "Factory Life As It Is," *Factory Tracts, Volume 1* (1845), American Textile History Museum Library, Lowell, MA.

racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholicism common among many native-born Americans. Whiteness, a long a contested category, allowed its members certain privileges, including access to better jobs, safe housing, political enfranchisement, and citizenship. Prior to arrival in the United States, immigrants would not have thought of their bodies as racially marked, but they had little choice but to adapt in order to place themselves within American society. David Roediger and James Barrett write "most [immigrants] did not arrive with conventional United States attitudes regarding 'racial' difference, let alone its significance and implications in the context of industrial America."[17] Within a racialized hierarchy, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe occupied a separate space below native-born white Americans, and had employment options characterized by low pay, long hours, dangerous conditions, and few opportunities for empowerment.[18]

In the early 1900s, Manhattan's Lower East Side factory owners hired a workforce largely comprised of young, female, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Because needlework was a common occupation for Jews in Europe, many found similar jobs upon their arrival in New York. Social theorists of the time saw "willingness" of Jewish workers to labor in filthy, dangerous and cramped spaces as justification for their occupation of the lower end of the social hierarchy. Social Darwinists promoted ideas that justified economic disparities and labor exploitation as logical outcomes of society since racial groups were positioned along the social

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[17] David Roediger and James R. Barrett, "In Between Peoples: Race, Nationality and the `New Immigrant' Working Class, *Journal of American Ethnic History Vol.* 16, no.3 (Spring 1997), p. 3.
[18] Thomas A. Guiglielmo argues that Italian Americans were not "in-between" races as many historians have accepted, but rather "racially inferior 'Dagoes' *and* privileged whites simultaneously." See *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 10.

hierarchy based on their abilities to compete and succeed. Whites were clearly the most fit given their position at the top. Closely connected to *laissez-faire* capitalism, the theory of Social Darwinism provided politicians the justification to refrain from regulating labor conditions. Eastern European immigrants lacked both political and economic power, which served to confirm the dominant narrative of their inferiority.[19]

While injuries were common, racist, nativist, and classist ideologies targeted workers as the problem rather than unsafe equipment. Many Slavic workers were referred to as "fools" when their inability to understand their English-speaking supervisor led to injuries. While some early reformers portrayed injured immigrants as careless, native-born Americans were viewed as the victims of poor construction or greedy capitalists.[20] Because sweatshop workers labored for long hours at such a fast pace, it was impossible for them to be vigilant constantly about their safety. However, in the early 1900s, in a demonstration of cross-class solidarity, middle-class and wealthy reformers who had the time and political access began to create monitoring systems to regulate factory working conditions.

In 1912, the New York Factory Investigating Commission concluded that the work done in garment factories was dangerous because of the disregard to the workers' bodies and humanity.[21] The Commission said:

> In common with the other branches of the clothing trade, the dangers to the women workers are not inherent in the industry itself, but are due to the

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[19] Gregory Claeys, "The 'Survival of the Fittest' and the Origins of Social Darwinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (2000), pp. 223-240.
[20] Laura Hapke, *Sweatshop: The History of an American Idea* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
[21] This commission was created as part of a series of reforms passed in the aftermath of the Triangle Fire, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

> conditions under which manufacture is conducted. The hazards of death or injury from fire that must be daily assumed by the women worker in loft factories on Manhattan Island are terrific. But the overcrowding of work rooms, long periods of overtime, with irregular daily schedules, running from ten to fourteen hours, with consequent over-fatigue and exhaustion, the speeding up of both workers and machines, which keeps nerves and muscles in continued tension, are factors that from day to day seriously impair the health and vitality of the women workers.[22]

If workers became disfigured, they lost their livelihood.[23] The equipment used in sweatshops became unsafe as it aged without proper service. Other machines were dangerous when coupled with poor ventilation, such as pressing machines. The steam used in these machines in laundries and garment factories led to tuberculosis, nicknamed "the tailors' disease," when workplaces were improperly ventilated.[24]

Workers were treated either like machines or as less than machines. Their working lives became tied to machines as they had to force their human bodies to accommodate ever increasing demands to produce greater amounts of textiles, garments, or other goods. The early grievances of the Lowell textile millhands included opposition to the speed-up and stretch-out. The speed-up occurred when management increased the speed of the machines, forcing the worker to speed up order to increase production. The stretch-out required a worker to manage greater numbers of machines, again to increase production. When combined, workers' health was compromised as industry attempted to squeeze all the possible labor

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[22] New York (State) Factory Investigating Commission, *Preliminary Report of the Factory Investigating Commission*, 1912, 3 vols. (Albany: The Argus Company, 1912), pp. 277-278.
[23] Some workers belonged to a union or workers association that offered some type of insurance that would provide a modest payment in case of injury.
[24]Nancy Green, "Fashion, Flexible Specialization, and the Sweatshop: A Historical Problem," *Sweatshop USA: The American Sweatshop in Historical and Global Perspective*, ed. Daniel E. Bender and Richard A. Greenwald (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 37-56.

from workers.[25] The attempted mechanization of humans was, and continued to be, a constant grievance of workers. Indeed workers have used the slogan "Workers are not machines!" throughout the 20th century, most famously by a South Korean sweatshop worker who shouted the phrase before killing himself by self-immolation in 1970.[26]

Industry dominated workers' lives in the home and the factory. NCL General Secretary Florence Kelley claimed that the most dangerous occupation was that of piece-workers who sewed garments in their tenement homes. Because piece-workers pay was determined by how many items they produced rather than amount of hours they worked, most were unable to survive unless they worked excessively long hours at home. Because their homes were beyond the reach of progressive investigators and regulation, the tenements were crowded, poorly ventilated, and prone to fires. Many workers, especially women, took their work home with them after a ten-hour workday in the factories. Their children helped them at night in order to maximize income. This meant that home was not a space of rest, relaxation, and leisure, but of dangerous and exhaustive labor for the whole family.

Uprising of 20,000

Despite the early labor activism in the Lowell Mills, few female workers belonged to unions or workers' associations, and few were optimistic about their employers improving conditions in factories and mills. Garment worker Pauline

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[25] The speed-up and stretch-out in textile mills often happened directly after a cotton harvest, resulting in uneven hours for workers.

[26] Dong-Myeon Shin, *Social and Economic Policies in Korea: Ideas, Networks, and Linkages* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p. 79.

Newman stated, "We wore cheap clothes, lived in cheap tenements, ate cheap food. There was nothing to look forward to, nothing to expect the next day to be better."[27] Many workers became active in organizing for better conditions, but traditional unions within the American Federation of Labor (AFL), founded in 1886, were uninterested in organizing women because they were deemed temporary workers who would leave the factories to make babies once married. Unions were dominated by men, devoted their resources to organizing male laborers and typically supported the idea of a male breadwinner and female homemaker and devoted their resources to organizing men. So while women were not officially barred from membership in most unions, leadership was typically comprised of men who were unwilling to commit to organizing women workers. Additionally, the AFL was far more committed to unionizing craft workers who performed what was considered "skilled work," and was typically done by native-born white men.

The lack of support from male-dominated unions failed to deter women's efforts at collective action. In 1909, after garment workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory voted to organize and instantly were fired, factory workers walked off and called a strike.[28] The AFL's International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) had a small membership and was not very active because its initially conservative leadership was not appealing to sweatshop workers. The mostly Jewish workforce who went on strike had little experience with organized labor,

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[27] Barbara Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 295.

[28] Those who participated in the strike were producing women's blouses, called "shirtwaists." At the time of the strike, shirtwaist productions was a fifty million dollar a year industry. See Stein, *Out of the Sweatshop,* p. 125.

though some had participated in or had knowledge of the rent strikes and meat boycotts that had been organized by women in New York earlier in the decade. Shirtwaist maker Clara Lemlich gave an impassioned speech at a mass meeting encouraging a general strike of all New York waistmakers, and within a few days, thousands of other workers in the shirtwaist industry followed. This strike became known as the "Uprising of 20,000," and it was the first major labor dispute involving women in the United States in the 20th century.[29]

The factory owners, police, courts, and conservative union leadership opposed the Uprising. At the time, the reach of Social Darwinism went well beyond the intellectual discussions of social theorists giant corporations held immense and unprecedented power that mostly went unchecked. The courts, law enforcement, and politicians were the enforcers of pro-business, anti-sweatshop policies that emboldened their commitment to *laissez-faire* economics.

The Supreme Court was packed with conservative justices who consistently ruled in favor of business in the decades leading up to the 1909 strike. In 1886, the Court ruled in favor of business in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* by granting corporations the same Constitutional protections as people. Business was quick to challenge the few labor laws that had improved the lives of workers, resulting in the blatantly uneven distribution of rights among employers and employees. In 1905, the Supreme Court heard a case that would limit the rights of workers and consumers for the next three decades. *Lochner v. New York* was an appeal from a bakery owner, Joseph Lochner, challenging the state's sixty-hour

[29] Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

week law. Lochner had been fined for working his bakers over sixty hours per week, and he chose to appeal the fined claiming that it was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Lochner, citing the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as having given birth to the "liberty of contract" doctrine.[30]

Essentially, the Court argued that state and federal labor standards impeded an individual's ability to contract their work. If a worker chose to enter into a contract with their employer to work over the state-determined maximum hours, it was unconstitutional to void that contract. The result was that maximum hour laws and minimum wage laws were declared unconstitutional during the early 1900s. Florence Kelley said, "Under the pressure of competition in American industry at this time, [liberty of contract] establishes in the practical experience of the unorganized, the unskilled, the illiterate, the alien, and the industrially subnormal women wage-earners, the constitutional right to starve."[31] Progressives criticized and vowed to break up the alliances between corrupt politics, courts, and business through regulations, standards, and policies that reflected a commitment to justice.[32]

Initially, top leadership in the AFL and conservative reformers did all they could to squash the impromptu general strike initiated by Clara Lemlich. They preached moderate reform and patience and were generally patronizing to the sweatshop workers. In spite of this, almost two thirds of those working in the

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[30] *Lochner v. New York*, 198 U.S. (1905).
[31] Florence Kelley, "Social Standards in Industry: Progress of Labor Legislation for Women," (1923), Box 10, Florence Kelley Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, New York, NY (hereafter Kelley papers).
[32] *Progressive Platform of 1912.*

industry walked out. The strikers were harassed, fined, arrested, and beaten. They also received death threats.[33] Companies hired thugs to break up the picket line, and the New York police arrested those on strike rather than the thugs. The police and thugs broke six of Lemlich's ribs and she was arrested seventeen separate times. Over seven hundred women were arrested, mostly on trumped up vagrancy charges. When giving his sentence, one judge told a male striker that, "You are on strike against God and nature, whose prime law is that man shall earn his bread in the sweat of his brow."[34]

Support from the WTUL and the NCL

Both the WTUL and NCL were important allies to the garment workers during the strike. The WTUL raised money for bail and strike relief, organized food donations and soup kitchens for strikers, walked on picket lines, and exposed sweatshop conditions through demonstrations. The ILGWU asked members of the WTUL to provide support on the picket lines because of the protection that middle-class women could offer. While many strikers had been arrested with little fanfare, when WTUL president Mary Dreier was arrested for harassing a strikebreaker, public sympathy began to align with the workers. Dreier was released as soon as the police discovered her identity, saying "'Why didn't you tell me you was a rich lady? I'd never have arrested you in the world.'"[35] Not only did the national media cover Dreier's arrest, but the police officer's words were reported leading to outrage among workers and community members.

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[33] "Shaw Takes a Hand in Waist Strike," *New York Times*, 6 January 1910.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Alice Henry, *The Trade Union Woman* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1915), p. 62.

After Dreier's arrest, even more prominent feminists and students joined or worked in conjunction with the WTUL to bear witness to the workers' struggle. Wives and daughters of wealthy industrialists, including Alva Vanderbilt Belmont and Anne Morgan, donated money and time to help support the strikers in 1909 and were able to use their class privilege to ensure that women strikers and picketers were treated more favorably than they would have otherwise. Morgan used her connections with the media to achieve favorable coverage, telling the editors of the *New York Times,* "When you hear of a woman who presses forty dozen skirts for only eight dollars a week, something must be wrong. And fifty-two hours a week seems little enough to ask."[36] Morgan applied for membership of the WTUL in order to show "her moral support."[37] Belmont used her mansion to secure the release of arrested picketers whose bail was set at one hundred dollars apiece. She gave the magistrate the deed to her home as collateral that the strikers would appear before court at a later date.[38]

The WTUL recruited female students from prestigious colleges to show their solidarity with striking workers. Stephen Norwood writes that, "In 1909-1910, students from Vassar, Wellesley, Barnard, and Bryn Mawr Colleges left their campuses to demonstrate solidarity with New York's striking women garment workers."[39] While in New York, these students were active in fundraising, speaking to crowds, picketing, and trying to protect workers from police violence. Back in

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[36] "Miss Morgan Aids Girl Waiststrikers," *New York Times*, 14 December 1909.
[37] Ibid.
[38] "Puts Up Her Mansion: Mrs. Belmont Goes Security for the Striking Shirt Waist Makers," *New York Citizen*, 20 December 1909, Reel 11, #971, Papers of the Women's Trade Union League and Its Principal Leaders, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
[39] Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 28.

Massachusetts, the Wellesley student newspaper proclaimed their support for the workers, noting that many of the workers were "girls just our own age."[40]

Like the WTUL, the NCL recruited young women on college campuses. The NCL sent letters to each of the members of the class of 1909 at Smith College asking them to use their positions as recent college graduates to fight against sweatshops. Of the twenty-one women who replied to the letter, six wanted to form a new chapter, six planned to join an existing chapter, and one was already serving on the Executive Board of the Consumers' League of Providence, Rhode Island. Four others, who held teaching positions, were organizing chapters at their schools. The national organization offered guidelines and suggestions for college students who wished to form a chapter on their campus and formed a Special Committee on Colleges and Graduates. While many of the committee's efforts focused on recruitment in elite, Northeastern women's colleges, it also responded to inquiries from schools in Washington, D.C.; Birmingham, Alabama; and Menomonee, Wisconsin.[41]

At the same time, the NCL worked to educate the public of the conditions in which their clothing was produced. The NCL made sure that the experiences of sweatshop workers could not go unnoticed by the public. In 1910, the NCL organized an exhibit to connect images of labor with the garments produced by children and exploited women and men. According to the *New York Times:*

> The photographs [were] pictures of certain tenement rooms on the east side, in which men, women, and little children [were] toiling for twelve and

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[40] *Wellesley College News*, 26 January1910, Wellesley College Archives, Margaret Clapp Library, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.
[41] National Consumers' League, 1910 Annual Meeting Minutes, reel 4, NCL Records.

> fourteen hours a day for a few cents a day. The garments which accompany the photographs [were] made by these tenement toilers.[42]

Both the event and the press received targeted the hearts of women shoppers. By framing the issue of sweatshops as a moral problem connected to greed, the NCL contrasted exploited workers with wealthy industrialists. Confronting middle-class and wealthy women with images of child labor attached to the very garments that she might be wearing would force her to think about her role as a consumer. She might decide to donate money to the strike or join the NCL. She might develop a critique of unrestrained capitalism that forced children to work in dangerous factories.

Additionally, the NCL brought up sweatshops as a public health issue. Without guaranteed sick days, workers could bring contagious diseases to work and transfer them to the clothing they touched, passing diphtheria and tuberculosis onto the unsuspecting consumer. The organization encouraged its middle-class members and allies to purchase goods that contained their "white label." According to the *Milwaukee Journal*:

> The Label is a slip of paper two inches by half an inch, bearing the stamp of the National Consumers' League and stating that the goods to which it is attached were made under clean and healthful conditions and that the use of the label is authorized after investigation.[43]

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[42] "Exhibit a Lesson to Women Shoppers: Fine Garments They Wear Made by Tenement Workers at Starvation Wages," *New York Times*, 12 January 1910.
[43] White Label Goods: Local Store Makes Stand with Consumers' League on Cleanly Factory Conditions," *Milwaukee Journal*, 11 August 1902.

This concern about public health was fairly common during the turn of the century when there were fears about the poor spreading their germs to the wealthy.[44] If a store contained no goods bearing the white label, the NCL gave consumers the necessary steps to determine whether the goods were produced in a factory with good inspection record.[45]

When the strike was called of in February 1910, the workers had not won union recognition. However, they had achieved a number of other tangible gains, including a shorter workweek and four paid holidays per year. Perhaps more importantly, it empowered the strikers and activists. It set the stage for future organizing as coalitions formed among workers and activists. Miriam Finn Scott, a journalist who covered the strike, wrote, "There has been a tradition that women cannot strike. These young, inexperienced girls have proved that women can strike, and strike successfully."[46] The numbers of women union members increased dramatically following the strike, mostly in the ILGWU. After the strike, the ILGWU represented over eighty percent of New York's shirtwaist workers. There was a shift in thought for many men and women who began to believe that it was valuable to organize women workers. Workers and culture reflected this shift with a much-repeated slogan, "We want bread, but we want roses, too."

Chicago Garment Workers Strike

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[44] For more on sweatshops as a public health issues, see Michael Willrich, *Pox: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011); Daniel Bender, *Sweated Work, Weak Bodies: Anti-Sweatshops and Languages of Labor* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
[45] National Consumers' League, 1909 Annual Meeting Minutes, reel 3, NCL Records.
[46] Miriam Finn Scott, What the Women Strikers Won," *Outlook*, 2 July 1910, p. 480.

New York was not the only city to experience labor struggles as a result of sweatshops in the early 20th century. 40,000 Chicago garment workers went on strike for seventeen weeks from September 1910 to February 1911. Conditions in Chicago factories were as wretched as those in New York. Russian immigrant and sweatshop worker Bessie Abramowitz Hillman said, "We all worked 90 to 100 hours a week for $8 or $9. Then we were threatened with a pay cut. It was too much for us so five of us girls started a fight to stop it."[47] While the terrible conditions led to frequent walkouts by individuals and small groups of workers, the 1910 strike was the first major labor dispute in Chicago led by a group of women. The importance of this dispute has been eclipsed somewhat due to the attention paid to New York's Uprising.

After the United Garment Workers union refused to help the strikers, they turned to NCL and WTUL activist Jane Addams and the Chicago chapter of the WTUL. Once the strike began strikers met at Hull House, which was later referred to as "a citadel of hope and strength" by Bessie Abramowitz Hillman. With Abramowitz Hillman and other strikers, Addams and WTUL president Margaret Dreier Robins organized an impressive coalition of professors, students, church members, and radicals to support strikers. Activists used their different skills and privileges to pressure the industry to capitulate to the strikers' demands.

Wellesley Economics professor and chair of the WTUL Committee on Grievances Katharine Coman wrote an article titled "A Sweated Industry" for the

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[47] As quoted in Donald Robinson, "Labor Leader's Wife Helped Form Amalgamated Clothing Workers 30 Years Ago," [unidentified Chicago newspaper, 1945] ACWA Papers, Box 120, Folder 4, Kheel Center, Cornell University.

WTUL monthly newsletter *Life and Labor*. Coman highlighted the reduced wages, abuse and authoritarian management, and fines for breaking needles or using too much soap when washing hands. She ended the article with a plea to middle-class and wealthy women, saying "To help to secure this right [recognition of workers' rights] of civilized industry the Women's Trade Union League, on behalf of the striking garment workers, asks the support of all those interested in the social welfare of their city."[48]

Other supporters walked on the picket lines with strikers in the middle of the Chicago winter. As they had done in New York, female students from the University of Chicago and Northwestern joined reformers such as Jane Addams and the strikers on the picket lines. As "society women," the students enjoyed greater protection from the police and industry-hired thugs. When they joined the picket line, they provided a shield to female strikers who were targets of violence.[49]

Additionally, activists raised funds and collected food and clothing to offer as strike relief for the strikers, totaling over 70,000 dollars. According to the WTUL's Strike Committee's official report, "out of about 750 individual contributions, about 470, or over three-fifths were contributed by women."[50] Many churches, clubs, and political groups donated significantly, with the greatest contribution coming from the Socialist women of Chicago.

The strike ended without any consensus among either workers or the coalition. It is generally considered to be a success because while the strikers did

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[48] Katharine Coman, "A Sweated Industry," *Life and Labor* (January 1911), p. 15.
[49] "Society Women Act as Pickets," *New York Evening Journal,* 31 October 1910.
[50] Caroline A. Lowe, "Solidarity Among Women as Shown by the Garment Workers' Strike in Chicago," *The Progressive Woman* (August 1911).

not win many demands, the strike laid the "foundation for the organization of the entire trade."[51] The massive strikes in Chicago and New York allowed garment workers and their allies to expose the dangers of sweatshops, and they demonstrated to labor leaders and employers that striking women could not be easily dismissed.

Triangle Fire

One year later, on March 25, 1911, New York's Triangle Fire killed 146 shirtwaist workers, who were mostly young, Jewish women who had recently emigrated from Eastern Europe. Unsafe conditions that had been highlighted during the Uprising caused the fire, demonstrating cruelty and harshness of industrial capitalism. Not only were the buildings poorly constructed and ventilated, they were not well maintained. The owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory illegally locked workers in their rooms so they would not take unauthorized breaks or steal. When a fire started at the top of the building, many workers were unable to access the stairs to avoid the burning building, and the fire escapes buckled under their weight. The firefighters' ladders were too short to reach the workers at the top and their hoses were not strong enough to put out the flames. Many women jumped from the ninth floor to escape the fire, but they fell to their deaths.[52]

Many were angry with the factory owners for these preventable deaths. 146 workers out of 500 were killed, some as young as fourteen. Of those who died, 129

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[51] Raymond Robins to Mary Dreier, 4 February 1911, folder 51, box, 2, Margaret Dreier Papers, Special Collections Library, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.
[52] David von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America,* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003).

were women and seven were men. With a few safety precautions, many of the workers could have escaped the burning building.

After the fire, many organizations came together to determine how to respond to the tragedy. Many of the workers who had been active in the Uprising had moved into the leadership roles with the WTUL and ILGWU. They had only recently left the Triangle Factory for activist work, and many had been close to the victims. A coalition of organizations, including the WTUL, ILGWU, and Jewish groups, determined that the appropriate response to the tragedy must include "three distinct phases - relief, protest and prosecution."[53] Rabbi Stephen Wise, a life-long progressive activist who co-founded the NAACP, served as President Franklin Roosevelt's advisor on issues relevant to Jewish Americans, and founded an independent Jewish religious movement at the Free Synagogue, stated, "We won't want an outburst of charity for those who have suffered only to have the whole thing forgotten in short order."[54] The goal was to provide support and then create change so that industry could not continue to value their profit over the safety of their workers.

The WTUL and several Jewish groups, including the Jewish Daily Forward and United Hebrew Trades, formed the Joint Relief Committee, which worked to raise funds to provide over 30,000 dollars in relief for the survivors and the families of the dead. The trade unions offered their support to survivors and dependents regardless of their union status. After the fire, union activist William Mailly wrote, "It was a working-class calamity and as such it was the duty of a working-class

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[53] William Mailly, "The Triangle Trade Union Relief," *American Federationist* (July 1911), pp. 544-547.
[54] Stein, *Out of the Sweatshop*, p. 135.

organization which sought the advancement and improvement of all the waistmakers through the trade union movement to go to the aid of its brothers and sisters."[55] Mailly claimed this was the first time in American history that a union not only mobilized fundraising, it also distributed the funds directly to those who needed it. Because many of the shirtwaist makers were recent immigrants, their families remained in Europe and had to be notified. Aid was sent to them as well, often in rubles since many of the victims were Russian. The relief provided support for dependents and covered funeral expenses. This committee worked in cooperation with several unions and the Red Cross to support the living and the families of the dead since the factory owners refused to provide assistance.[56]

While many of the victims' families arranged their funerals, some were buried by the coalition of unions, activists, and Jewish organizations. In addition to providing funds for funerals, the Joint Relief Committee made the arrangements to bury twenty-one of the deceased workers. It took days for some of the wives, sisters, daughters and friends to be identified because of their injuries, but most were eventually identified and buried. Six of the victims were unidentified and buried as "unknown."[57] Led by the ILGWU, the coalition of allies organized a massive funeral demonstration to honor the victims of the fire and to bury the unidentified. In 1911,

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[55] William Mailly, "The Triangle Trade Union Relief."
[56] Report of the Joint Relief Committee, Ladies Waist and Dressmakers Union, Local 25 on the Triangle Fire Disaster, January 15, 1913, New York, Box 1, Cornell University, Kheel Center for Labor Management Documentation and Archives, Ithaca, NY.
[57] The "unidentified" were identified in 2011, approximately 100 years after the fire. Amateur genealogist and historian Michael Hirsch spent four years researching the identities of the six unknowns. See Joseph Berger, "100 Years Later, the Roll of the Dead in a Factory Fire Is Complete," *New York Times*, 20 February 2011.

labor journalist Martha Bensley Breure wrote an account of the funeral that connected the danger of all factory work to the tragedy of the Triangle Fire.

> There have been no carriages, no imposing marshals on horseback; just thousands and thousands of working men and women carrying the banners of their trades through the long three-mile tramp in the rain. Never have I seen a military pageant or triumphant ovation so impressive; for it is not because 146 workers were killed in the Triangle shop – not altogether. It is because every year there are 50,000 working men and women killed in the United States – 136 a day; almost as many as happened to be killed together on the 25th of March; and because slowly, very slowly, it is dawning on these thousands on thousands that such things do not have to be![58]

By linking the fire to dangerous conditions pervasive throughout the country, the anti-sweatshop coalition demonstrated that this was not an isolated occurrence. Rather, it was the result of industry practices designed to maximize profits. These tragic and preventable deaths and injuries had become increasingly common throughout the country with thousands dying every year.[59]

Survivors and their allies protested the negligence that led to the fire. Socialist lawyer Morris Hillquit connected the fire to the Uprising by saying:

> The girls who went on strike last year were trying to readjust the conditions under which they were obliged to work. I wonder if there is not some connection between the fire and that strike. I wonder if the magistrates who sent to jail the girls who did picket duty in front of the Triangle shop realized last Saturday that some responsibility may be theirs. Had the strike been successful, these young girls might have been alive today and the citizenry of New York would have less of a burden upon its conscience.

The owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory were arrested and indicted on charges of first and second-degree manslaughter. In spite of workers and experts' testimonies, they were acquitted and received a large insurance settlement. A small

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[58] Martha Bensley Breure, "What Is To Be Done?" Leon Stein, ed., *Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy* (New York: Quadrangle/New Times Book Company, 1977), pp. 194-195.
[59] Katie Marsico, *The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: Its Legacy of Labor Rights* (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish, 2009).

number of civil suits were filed against the owners after this, and they were forced to pay seventy-five dollars for each victim. The owners continued to operate outside of even the most lax labor standards of the time. One was charged for locking workers in the building again in 1913. While he was fined a minimal sum, he received an apology for the nuisance of appearing in court. A few months later, authorities cited him again for fire hazards in the factory. The judge issued a warning rather than a fine or prison sentence. Despite the evident disregard for the lives of workers sweating in their factories, the elites could count on the justice system to operate on their behalf. Many were outraged that the justice system refused to hold the elite accountable for the loss of for human life. One newspaper wrote, "Capital can commit no crime when it is in pursuit of profits."[60]

After the fire, socialite activist Anne Morgan and Alva Vanderbilt Belmont hosted a meeting on behalf of the WTUL at the Metropolitan Opera House on April 2, 1911. A crowd of 3,500 gathered to pay respect to the dead, support the living, and discuss how to win reforms that would ensure this could happen again. Members of all economic groups criticized the fire and the dangerous conditions, and those in attendance included survivors of the fire, wealthy elites, reformers, politicians, and clergy.[61]

Members of the clergy criticized of the greed of the elite, saying, "We have put property rights above life."[62] Rabbi Wise said, "This was not the deed of God but the greed of man. This was no inevitable disaster which could not be foreseen.

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[60] "147 Dead, Nobody Guilty," *Literary Digest*, 6 January 1912, p. 6.
[61] *Richard Greenwald, The Triangle Fire, Protocols Of Peace, and Industrial Democracy In Progressive Era New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).
[62] Stein, p. 142.

Some of use foresaw it."[63] Many spoke of the necessity for unions and working-class autonomy. However, the resolution proposed by moderate reformers was for a "creation of a Bureau of Fire Prevention, asking for more inspectors, demanding the creation of a system of workmen's [sic] compensation."[64] They hoped for strong reform without a working-class revolution. Many workers were not impressed with this objective since similar resolutions had failed to bring about tangible reform. Female sweatshop workers' voices often found little representation on committees and bureaus such as the one proposed. Additionally, this approach to reform would not create the kind of change needed to ensure safe factories, and it would not free the survivors of the fire from their dependence on sweatshop work. As the meeting was starting to descend into chaos with shouting and hissing, WTUL leader Rose Schneiderman went to the front of the Opera House to speak about the need for direct action.

Schneiderman had been active in the Uprising of 20,000 and left garment work to be an organizer in the WTUL. While she spoke softly, her speech is one of the most oft-quoted in radical American history. Schneiderman said, "I would be a traitor to those poor burned bodies, if I were to come here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public—and we have found you wanting." Schneiderman did not want to talk about shared sympathy. As a woman who knew many of the deceased sweatshop workers and knew their daily exploitation, her sorrow was far more intense than that of the elite reformers, such as Morgan or Belmont. Schneiderman went on to say:

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[63] Ibid., p. 143.
[64] Ibid., p. 143.

> We have tried you, citizens! We are trying you now and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers and brothers and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable, the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us. Public officials have only words of warning for us—warning that we must be intensely orderly and must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back when we rise—back into the conditions that make life unbearable. I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. And the only way is through a strong working-class movement.[65]

Schneiderman's speech galvanized many who heard it. Leading activists, such as Vice-President of the NCL Frances Perkins, were present for the speech, and it impacted their views on the need for true cross-class alliances. Scheiderman argued that the working class must be at the center of the movement against sweatshops and class exploitation. The middle class should not dictate actions to the working-class activists; rather, they should support the working class by listening to their needs. Ultimately, the meeting resulted in a resolution to pressure the state to form a Bureau of Fire Prevention.

New Labor Standards

While those responsible for the Triangle Fire were not held accountable, the WTUL and the NCL fought for reforms that began to provide greater safety standards for workers. Historian Landon Storrs writes, "Dismayed by the casualties inflicted by the 'invisible hand' of the market, [the NCL] advocated using state power to subordinate private interests to the welfare of the entire community."[66] After the fire, the WTUL asked factory workers to fill out a questionnaire detailing their

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[65] Stein, p. 144-145.
[66] Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism,* p. 15.

working conditions. After hundreds of workers had sent in their responses, the WTUL was armed with enough evidence to condemn industry and government, and they began to see results quickly. In October of 1911, the city council created a Bureau of Fire Prevention and tightened fire prevention standards within the building codes. However, the WTUL and NCL realized that was not enough, and they needed to influence policy at the state level.

It would be simple for a future business-friendly state government to override the city's new and improved safety standards if the reforms were not matched at the state level. At the time, NCL leader Frances Perkins was the Secretary of the New York City Committee on Public Safety. Perkins worked with New York Governor John Dix and several sympathetic Democratic politicians to create laws improve working conditions and provide the funding to investigate abuses. In June 1911, the New York state legislature established the Factory Investigative Commission (FIC) to be led by Perkins. They received support from New York Fire Chief Edward Croker, who testified about the preventable tragedies he had witnessed due to lack of accountability. When asked how common it was for firefighters to find locked doors within factories, he answered, "Oh, yes, plenty of them…they pay absolutely no attention to the fire hazard or to the protection of the employees in these buildings. That is their last consideration."[67] During his testimony, Croker said, "There should be mandatory legislation to compel them to keep the doors unlocked during working hours." Far from being naïve, Croker knew

[67] New York (State) Factory Investigating Commission, *Preliminary Report of the Factory Investigating Commission*, (Albany: The Argus Company, 1912), pp. 2:5-6, 14-21, 35-36, 39-40.

that legislation without teeth would not compel the industry to obey. When asked how he thought the reforms could be enforced, he answered:

> You can't make it [penalty for breaking laws] too heavy. You have got a class of people doing business constantly, not only in New York City, with whom you've got to deal severely, and give them to understand that there is the law, and they have got to obey it, for the protection of property and the people that they employ. If you don't have drastic legislation you can't get anything from them.

The ideas that Croker spoke of represented a shift in thought about the role of government to monitor industry. After years of fighting fires in factories, Croker did not believe that businesses would monitor themselves. He insisted that regulations with severe penalties were necessary in order to protect the lives of workers.

The FIC was able to achieve an impressive array of reforms because they had public opinion and a sympathetic state legislature on their side. In addition to the passage of legislation written to prevent another fire, the FIC extended its mission to reform the sweatshop by regulating child labor, wages, and hours. During their first year, anti-sweatshop activists received funding from the state to investigate workplaces throughout the state and heard testimony from 222 workers, public employees, and union organizers. They drafted progressive reforms and, despite Republican opposition, had thirty-six laws passed by the New York legislature. New York served as a testing ground for other states, which would adopt many of the worker-friendly policies. Later, NCL activist Frances Perkins went on pass the same kinds of legislation at a federal level through the New Deal.

Protective Legislation

Activists also sought to achieve protective legislation for women. In the landmark Progressive Era decision *Muller v. Oregon,* an employer was fined for forcing his employees to work longer than ten-hour days. At the time, Oregon had legislation designed to protect women by restricting the number of hours they could work to ten per day. While the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of business in *Lochner v. New York*, it unanimously supported laws enforcing shorter workdays for women based on the "difference between the sexes."[68]

NCL activists Florence Kelley and Josephine Clara Goldmark hired future Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis to represent the state of Oregon against the Muller's attack on protective legislation. Goldmark, Brandeis' sister-in-law, compiled evidence that would demonstrate the link between poor working conditions and poor health. The "Brandies Brief" included hundreds of sources that established the damaging impact of long hours and harsh working environments on women's abilities to reproduce, care for children, and lead healthy and moral lives. When speaking at a Social Work conference in 1923, Kelley said, "[Brandies] was convinced that, if the social facts of industry could be presented to the course of last resort, it might become possible the United States to take its place among civilized nation."[69] This brief was a major departure from the way in which cases were typically heard, and the case was the first time that an argument was focused on the human impact of laws, in conjunction with legal doctrine. The Brandies Brief

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[68] *Muller v. Oregon,* 208 U.S. 412 (1908).
[69] Florence Kelley, "Social Standards in Industry: Progress of Labor Legislation for Women," (1923), Box 10, Kelley Papers.

forever changed the way that the Supreme Court heard cases and had lasting implications for gender-specific legislation.

Muller declared that women's bodies were not well-suited for working extremely long hours in harsh conditions. Because society expected women to give birth to and care for future generations, much of the language surrounding these laws referred the state's interest in protecting women's maternal health. The opinion of the Supreme Court stated, "The physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race."[70] However, the concern for future generations was not spread uniformly since these laws did not cover all women equally. They only covered roughly one third of wage-earning women, excluding most occupations held by women of color and white-collar workers.[71]

Protective legislation divided groups working to improve women's lives, since there were differing perceptions of whether this helped or hurt women. Some feminists believed that women should have full equality with men and that laws, like the one considered in *Muller*, further stereotypical gender roles. They believed that they were a step back for all women because they were not actually meant to help them. When reflecting on the Muller case, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said that the protective labor laws, "were in many instances protecting [women] from better paying jobs and opportunities for promotion."[72] Male-centered labor unions often

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[70] *Muller v. Oregon.*
[71] Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[72] Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "Muller v. State of Oregon: One Hundred Years Later," *Willamette Law Review* 45, pp. 359-370.

favored protective legislation for women because it kept them from competing with men for jobs.[73]

While a number of states had protective legislation prior to *Muller*, after the case was upheld, over twenty states adopted similar polices centered around maternal health.[74] Massachusetts, which passed their first maternalist law in 1874, provided a model that many states chose to emulate. The Massachusetts law required that, "No woman shall be employed in laboring in a manufacturing or mechanical establishment more than ten hours in any one day…and in no case shall the hours of labor exceed fifty-eight in a week."[75] While many states were enacting gender-specific labor laws, the National Women's Party introduced the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. It created a significant rift in cross-class alliances that had been carefully fostered over the past decade due to disagreements over protective legislation.

In 1925, *Good Housekeeping* published a written debate between Mary Anderson and Rheta Childe Dorr on the topic of labor laws for women. Anderson was a member of the WTUL and the Chief of the Women's Bureau within the Department of Labor. She worked in Chicago factories after emigrating from Sweden as a teenager and was active in the 1910 strike. Dorr was the editor of the woman's department of the *New York Evening Post*. She investigated labor

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[73] Phillip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement from Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).
[74] Holly J. McCammon, "The Politics of Protection: State Minimum Wage and Maximum Hours Laws for Women in the United States, 1870-1930," *Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 217-249
[75] *Revised Laws of Massachusetts,* ch. 106, §24 (1902). Reprinted in *Landmark Briefs and Arguments of the Supreme Court of the United States: Constitutional Law,* vol. 16 (Arlington: University Publications of America, 1975), p. 66.

conditions for women and children and also wrote about elite clubwomen's activities.

Both women had witnessed the dangers of sweatshops, but had different ideas about the solutions. Dorr critiqued the Brandies Brief for blaming women's poor health and wreaked bodies on the "single fact that women were working outside the home for wages."[76] She wrote that there were too many factors that made workingwomen's lives untenable, including sexism, poverty, and poor housing. Ultimately, she argued that, "Unequal wages and bad factory conditions, and not special laws for adult women workers, are the things in which we all should interest ourselves. Sex has nothing to do with the case." While Anderson agreed with the need to create greater standards for all workers, she argued that women were disproportionately impacted by low wages and poor conditions they endured on top of their "second shift" of cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. She gives the following as reasons that demonstrated the necessity for gender-specific legislation:

> Chief of these was and is the fact that men in general work under much better conditions than women, where they work at night they can sleep during the day, and there are in any event no such double demands upon their energies as upon the wage-earning wife and mother; and, though men's wages are too often very low, they are never, I think we can safely say, as low as women's. The ditch-digger, the coal-heaver--any of the very least skilled of men--draw a better wage than do thousands of skilled and semi-skilled women.[77]

Anderson attributed the existing regulatory laws for women to the widespread public support for them. Both Anderson and Dorr saw the ways that industrial capitalism and patriarchy worked together to disproportionally impact female

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[76] "Should There Be Labor Laws for Women? No, Says Rheta Childe Dorr; Yes, Says Mary Anderson," *Good Housekeeping*, (September 1925), pp. 156-164.
[77] "Should There Be Labor Laws for Women?" pp. 166-180.

workers, but their conclusions were different and represented a crack in the burgeoning feminist movement. The unsuccessful Equal Rights Amendment campaign divided activists. The WTUL, the NCL, and most of the labor movement were in favor of the protective legislation for women while many of the more affluent women, including Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, were opposed to policies that kept them from having equal opportunities.[78] Both contingents claimed to represent the needs and wishes of the female working class. By the 1930s, much of the protective legislation became unnecessary as New Deal policy implemented minimum wages and maximum hour laws for most men and women. Later in the 20th century, states repealed or ruled the majority of the maternalist laws unconstitutional for singling women out for unequal treatment.[79]

Conclusion

The WTUL and the NCL were instrumental in dulling the harshness of early 20th century industrial capitalism. These activists demonstrated their commitment to a better workplace across class lines. While some of their efforts focused on short-term aid, such as strike relief, other activists made life-long commitments to fighting for policies that would improve working conditions. Both the WTUL and the NCL created avenues for thousands of middle-class and elite women acted in solidarity with sweatshops workers. Perkins and Kelley pressured those in power to allocate funds for investigations and enforcement of labor laws. Students from colleges such as Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, and Northwestern left their campuses to

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[78] Alva Belmont, "Work of the Woman's Party for the First Five Years," *Equal Rights XIII* 15 May 1926.
[79] For more on the evolution of protective legislation, see Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (New York: Modern Library, 2011); Diane Basler, *Sisterhood and Solidarity: Feminism and Labor in Modern Times* (Boston: South End Press, 1999).

support women their age and younger. Teachers taught their students about sweatshops and wrote articles explaining the need for reforms. The WTUL and NCL created avenues for their members to use their time, skills, and resources to shine a light on the problems of the unrestrained, unregulated industrial elite.

In 1964, Frances Perkins said, "It seems in some way to have paid the debt owed to those children, those young people who lost their lives in the Triangle Fire. It's their [activists] contribution to the people of New York that we have this really magnificent set of laws to protect and improve the law regarding the protection of work[ing] people."[80] The "magnificent set of laws" sent capital in search of new spaces for sweatshop labor. In my next chapter, I will explore capital's response to the achievements of workers, the NCL, WTUL, and other Progressive Era groups. They would experience a massive backlash in the 1920s as business interests used their economic and political power to reassert their authority.

[80] Lectures of Frances Perkins, Collection /3047, 30 September 1964, Cornell University, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Ithaca, NY.

CHAPTER TWO

The Second Gilded Age: Capital's Response to the Progressive Era

The successes of the anti-sweatshop activists of the 1910s were short lived, as business interests assembled their available tools to reclaim power over workers. Capital's response to the progressives was swift and severe. The Twenties saw wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, giving elite industrialists vast amounts of control. Corporate profits rose over sixty percent between 1923 and 1929, and the top one percent of the population experienced a seventy-five percent increase in their per capita income over the course of the decade, in comparison to the nine percent increase experienced by the entire country. The widening income gap suggests that the elite did not seek to be merely comfortably wealthy. Rather, they desired to maximize their profits at the expense of workers and families, and they used the many tools at their disposal to achieve it. Following their lead, the media and government denounced organized labor in the wake of the Red Scare, and unions lost one million members.

When northern and midwestern workers held power through state regulation or union membership, industry simply shifted their production, often relocating to the South. The South operated as a haven to business owners, undermining gains made by workers and activists in the 1910s. Corporate elites worked in concert with the federal government and the Supreme Court to break unions, cut wages, and crush many of labor's gains from the previous years. In this chapter, I examine the backlash against immigration, unionization of workers, and passage of progressive labor laws that allowed elites to use their influence to assert

their unlimited power within the workplace. Law enforcement, courts, and employers each used their platforms to push activism away from the mainstream and back to the margins in the decade between the Progressive Era and the New Deal.

Economic and Political Landscape of the 1920s

As American industry boomed during World War I, so did the economy. In order to sustain high profits after the war's end, factories switched from making war goods to consumer goods. Businesses expanded their markets overseas while domestic consumption increased. The advertising, radio, sports, and film industries helped create a national culture around consumption and leisure. As more Americans entered urban factories with little autonomy or space for advancement, they looked to non-work activities for fulfillment and enjoyment. Many sought to escape the monotony of routinized factory work through trips to the movies, professional sporting events, and the local department store. They listened to shows and played music on the radio in their spare time, and by 1927, almost seven million radio sets had been sold. Working-class women and men claimed their right to leisure as they frequented increasingly popular nightclubs to dance and listen to jazz music.[1]

Many Americans began to define themselves by the goods they purchased. While only the wealthiest Americans had been able to purchase automobiles in the

[1] Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Carol J. Martin, *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and 1930s* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 1994); Amy Koritz, *Culture Makers: Urban Performance and Literature in the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

early 1900s, by the Twenties, Henry Ford's Model T was affordable for millions of middle and working-class families. Recognizing that women were the primary consumers, marketing campaigns targeted them in order to sell appliances for the home. Using credit, or "installment plans," the middle-class bought cars, furniture, radios, clothing, and refrigerators. Advertisers sought to destigmatize debt by contrasting the happy consumer who bought with credit with the miser, whose life was passing him by while he saved. In 1929, seven billion dollars of consumer goods were purchased on credit.[2]

The United States became the richest country in the world during the 1920s. Its gross national product nearly doubled from sixty billion to one hundred billion dollars. While wages remained somewhat stagnant, *laissez-faire* policies allowed corporate profits to skyrocket from 3.9 billion dollars in 1922 to 7.2 billion in 1929.[3] Business used their economic power to influence national laws and practices.

The presidential administrations of the 1920s rank among the most conservative in American history. President Warren Harding, who served from 1921 to 1923, appointed friends and campaign donors to prominent government positions, where they used their newfound power for financial gain. During his two years in office, Harding appointed four bro-business, anti-regulation justices to the Supreme Court and cut federal spending and lowered taxes. He oversaw the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, which limited immigration from Europe, particularly Southern and Eastern Europe. The lack of immigrant labor in

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[2] Prior to World War I, a Ford would cost the average worker two years worth of wages, but the late'20s, it cost three months.
[3] James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990).

the North encouraged factory and mill owners to migrate south in search of a cheap and pliable workforce and a welcoming political community.

Upon Harding's death, Calvin Coolidge took office and served until 1929. According to historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., for Coolidge, "government justified itself only as it served business."[4] A supporter of *laissez-faire* principles, he continued many of Harding's policies, such as lowering taxes on the wealthy and businesses, increasing tariffs to protect American businesses, and further restricting immigration. Harding and Coolidge's preference for the elite caused liberal intellectuals such as Walter Lippmann to view the '20s as a reemergence of the Gilded Age.[5] The economic policies of this era sanctioned the collusion of industry and government, extreme financial excesses, and the creation of agencies designed to subdue activists and signaled that the state was becoming smarter about repression.

Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover used their positions to appoint officials who acted on behalf of the business elite. For example, Andrew Mellon served as Secretary of Treasury from 1921 until 1932. Mellon, a phenomenally wealthy industrialist and investment banker, believed that in order to raise revenue, the government needed to drastically reduce taxes so that taxpayers would not evade payment. He proposed cutting the top income tax rate from seventy-seven to twenty-four percent, which Congress agreed to over the course of the decade. This allowed those in the highest income brackets to amass unprecedented wealth.

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[4] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 57.
[5] See David Greenberg, *Calvin Coolidge* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

The extreme income inequality of the 1920s caused the political pendulum to swing the other direction by the next decade as voters rejected the *laissez-faire* economic policies. The federal government had allowed the interests of businesses to trump the interests of the majority of its citizens. During his acceptance speech at the 1932 Democratic Convention, Franklin Roosevelt said of the previous decade, "corporate profit resulting from this period was enormous; at the same time little of that profit was devoted to the reduction of prices. The consumer was forgotten. Very little of it went into increased wages; the worker was forgotten."[6] According to Roosevelt, while the previous administrations ignored workers and consumers, they had not forgotten about their friends in business.

During World War I, in order to keep labor unrest low and productivity high, President Wilson created the National War Labor Board made up of representatives from business and labor to serve as arbitrators during labor disputes. Unions grew during the war, and workers won higher wages and better conditions.[7] However, in 1922, WTUL activist Frieda Miller said, "With the end of the war came the removal of all government restraint and the companies refusal to deal with the representatives of the workers."[8] Businesses loaded with wartime profits wielded immense economic and political power as they moved to limit or even eliminate the gains that workers and their allies had made in the previous decade.

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[6] Franklin D. Roosevelt, Acceptance Speech at the Democratic Convention, July 2, 1932.
[7] The National War Labor Board opposed strikes and supported an eight-hour day, wage increases to match rising costs, equal pay for women, and collective bargaining.
[8] Frieda S. Miller, "Organizing Wives and Mothers," *The Survey* 48, (New York: Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, 1922), p. 241

Rather than competing with one another, corporate elite joined forces to fight against workers' gains. No longer forced to cooperate with labor due to wartime demands, business elites sought not only high profits, but also absolute authority over workers. Industry developed a policy attacking organized labor that associated unions with Bolshevism and anti-Americanism. In 1921, a group of approximately 200 business leaders met in Chicago and formally coined the term, the "American Plan" to describe the non-union open shop.[9] Their motto was "Every man to work out his own salvation and not be bound by the shackles of organization to his own detriment."[10] Adapting a tactic from the National Consumers' League, some companies used patriotic, anti-union labels to designate that organized workers did not produce their materials. However, their disapproval of collective power only applied to workers. Thousands of individuals joined business associations, such as the 23,000 member American Bankers' Association, in order to work together to further their interests.[11]

Employers who supported the American Plan refused to negotiate with unions. Management forced workers to sign "yellow dog contracts" as a condition of their employment. A major component to these contracts was requirement that workers agree to not join a union. According to one worker, these contracts, "reduces to the level of a yellow dog any man that signs it, for he signs away every right he possesses under the Constitution and laws of the land and makes himself

[9] An open shop is a workplace that does not require its workers to join a union or pay dues. This is in contrast with a closed shop in which employment is contingent on union membership.
[10] Elbert E. Stevens, "The Great Open Shop Conspiracy," *Labor Digest* 13, No 3 (April 1921), p. 6.
[11] *Journal of the American Bankers Association* 14, (1922).

the truckling, helpless slave of the employer."[12] They were so common that, by 1929, about 200,000 workers had signed a yellow dog contract.[13] Some companies like Bethlehem Steel went even further, refusing to do business with others "who were so unpatriotic as to hire union labor."[14] Bethlehem Steel, Standard Oil, and Proctor and Gamble also formed company unions that were dominated and often controlled, by the employers. Company unions undermined independent unions, which were usually affiliated with the American Federation of Labor or the Industrial Workers of the World.

First Red Scare

Directly preceding the 1920s was a series of strikes as workers tried to hold onto their gains from World War I. When workers saw their improved conditions slipping away, many sought to agitate for higher wages, shorter hours, and greater power in the workplace, most notably including the strike wave of 1919. Two of the most notable strikers involved Boston police officers and steel workers across the country.[15] In both cases, the state and the employers used violence against the striking workers, while accusing workers of acting as "agents of Lenin."[16] Local officials worked with the federal government, media, and business to link the strikes with dangerous radicalism. American authorities grew concerned about the

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[12] The comment was made by the editor of the *United Mine Workers Journal*, as quoted in Joel I. Seidman, *The Yellow Dog Contract* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932), p. 11.
[13] Daniel Ernst, "The Yellow-Dog Contract and Liberal Reform, 1917-1932," *Labor History* 30, no. 2, (Spring 1989), pp. 251-274.
[14] Sidney Lens, *The Labor Wars: From the Molly Maguires to the Sit Downs* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 223. Also, see Wakstein, Allen M. "The Origins of the Open-Shop Movement, 1919–1920," *Journal of American History* 51 (1964): pp. 460–475.
[15] For more on the steel strike, see David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). For more on the police strike, see Rosalind Russell, *A City in Terror: Calvin Coolidge and the 1919 Boston Police Strike* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).
[16] Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919–1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 126.

perceived increased militancy within the labor movement, anarchists' growing influence, and the Bolshevik revolution. When thousands of workers crossed class and craft lines in Seattle during the first general strike in the United States, they became an easy target for the corporate-controlled media and elected officials. It also serves as an example of how the courts, politicians, and business worked in concert to oppose workers.

While the majority of workers who participated in the five-day work stoppage in February 1919 were members of AFL unions, the media and government focused on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizers, portraying the strikers as dangerous radicals and communists who posed an internal threat to national security. Even while the workers and organizers, tried to distance the strike from the IWW, and the IWW itself claimed no direct leadership, the media did its best to perpetuate Americans' fears of revolution. Additionally, the Seattle mayor referred to many AFL leaders as "Reds."[17] According to Mayor Ole Hanson, "this [labor unrest] was an attempted revolution which they expected to spread all over the United States."[18] Hanson deliberately exaggerated the threat, even prompting other Washington mayors to criticize his overly zealous fear mongering.[19]

In order to stop the Seattle strike, Hanson spent 50,000 dollars to deputize one thousand men, giving them guns and orders to shoot strikers if necessary.[20] The

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[17] Ed Weston, interviewed by Robert Friedheim in 1946, folder 6, box 1, Robert Friedheim Seattle General Strike Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, WA.
[18] Henry Campbell Black, "The Enemy within Our Gates: Bolshevism's Assault upon American Government," *The Constitutional Review* 3, no. 1 (January 1919), p. 76.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "Many Sworn in as 'Cops,'" Seattle *Union Record,* 6 February 1919.

amount of resources necessary to organize, train, and arm such an immense group indicates the imbalance of power between employers and employees. While employers could make use of their wealth, the law, the media, and infrastructure, workers had only the ability to withhold their labor. Failing to capture public support and facing extreme repression from the police, most strikers returned to work after five days. Business interests and conservative Americans praised Mayor Hanson for ending the strike. He received a message from the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, who wrote to "convey the hearty congratulations of the business community of San Francisco upon the strong, vigorous and American way in which you are handing the difficult situation."[21] Not content for the workers to simply return to work, the U.S. Department of Justice worked with local officials to arrest and deport radicals.

Washington Governor Louis Hart organized a campaign to rid the Pacific Northwest of leftist groups and individuals.[22] In addition to raiding IWW offices in Oregon and Washington, officers ransacked several leftist newspaper offices and print shops at the behest of the U.S. District Attorney. In a less official manner, the American Legion, in addition to thugs hired by local lumber company, raided the IWW office in Centralia, Washington.[23] The actions taken by Hart were precursors for the Palmer Raids.

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[21] "Congratulations Power in on Mayor Hanson," *Seattle Times* 11 February 1919.
[22] "Raids Ordered by Palmer: I.W.W. Editor and Directors at Seattle Held under Espionage Law," *New York Times,* 14 November 1919.
[23] The tension between the groups escalated in November 1919 when a fight resulted in six deaths, for which the IWW members were prosecuted. Additionally, a vigilante mob seized Wesley Everest, one of the arrested Wobblies, from the sheriff's office and lynched him. No one was ever charged with his murder. The IWW alleges that Everest was also castrated, though the police denied the accusation.

Attorney General Alexander Palmer was given a mandate by President Wilson to rid the country of radical agitators and he had at his disposal a number of repressive laws passed during World War I to ensure loyalty. The Palmer Raids took place in November 1919 and January 1920 in order to suppress leftist organizations and organizations. Police and federal agents rounded up over 4,000 individuals in over twenty states with alleged connections to radical organizations. Congress passed the Espionage Act in 1917 criminalizing speech and actions that might impede the success of the war effort. Socialist presidential candidate and activist Eugene Debs served five years in prison for making a speech that obstructed recruitment in violation of the Espionage Act. In 1918, Congress passed the Sedition Act, which amended and extended the Espionage Act prohibiting "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about the government or military efforts. Anarchist historian Paul Avrich writes, "Some fifteen hundred prosecutions were carried out under the Espionage and Sedition Acts, resulting in more than a thousand convictions."[24]

In the summer of 1919, a number of judges, business elites, and politicians, including Palmer and John D. Rockefeller, were targeted by anarchist bomb-makers.[25] The anarchists who prescribed to this extreme violence were not aiming to help workers and are more accurately described as “madmen” rather than activists, and they terrified the public. The repressive climate coupled with

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[24] Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 94.

[25] While none of the targets were killed or injured, an African-American domestic worker’s hands were blown off by one bomb, and an elderly night watchman was killed while investigating another. No one was ever tried and convicted for the bombings. See “Plotter Hid Trail Skillfully: Victim Was a Night Watchman,” *New York Times,* 4 June 1919.

increasing bomb deliveries, allowed the state to conduct the Palmer Raids in the name of national security.

The first raid Palmer ordered took place on November 7, when police arrested 650 people in twelve cities. Mitchel Lavrowsky, a fifty-year-old retired Russian immigrant who lived quietly with his wife and children, was among those arrested. He was teaching math to adult students at the Russian People's House, a local community center for Russian immigrants, on the night of November 7. New York detectives and agents from the Justice Department beat and arrested two hundred people, mostly students and teachers, and destroyed their classrooms. When the police released Lavrowsky a few hours after his arrest, he had a fractured skull, shoulder, and foot. Seventy-five percent of those arrested at the community center were simply "in the wrong place at the wrong time."[26] Palmer and many others associated Eastern European immigrant communities with violent radicalism and agitation.

Government agents arrested thousands of immigrants and citizens during the Palmer Raids, often without warrants. Many were detained for months without access to their families or legal counsel and never had charges filed against them. The raids were not about identifying violent threats as the officials and the media suggested. In fact, police found few weapons and no explosives during the raids. Rather, Palmer targeted those whose ideas about politics and economics were not in

[26] Only 39 of the several hundred arrested were members of Union of Russian Workers, the group the agents aimed to investigate. See Christopher M. Finan, *From the Palmer Raids to the Patriot Act: A History of the Fight for Free Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), p. 2.

step with unregulated American capitalism. A popular magazine published an article written by Palmer who defended the raids, stating:

> While they have stirred discontent in our midst, while they have infected our social ideas with the disease of their own minds and unclean morals, we can get rid of them! And not until we have done so shall we have removed the menace of Bolshevism for good.[27]

Palmer's hysteria and exaggeration of the threat to national security eventually caught up with him, as other officials grew concerned about defending civil liberties. While Palmer wanted to deport thousands of the detainees, Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Post, who had jurisdiction over the matter, only permitted around 500 deportations. Indeed, when Post limited the deportations, Palmer appealed to President Wilson to fire him, though he was unsuccessful.[28] The aggressive actions taken by Palmer represented the collaboration between the state and business. The anti-labor violence of the post-World War I years ensured that free-market capitalism was safe from the organizers demanding not only better wages and conditions, but also a more egalitarian workplace. Capital had other weapons at its disposal as well.

Judicial Support

Business could also count on the federal courts to champion their causes. National Consumers' League activist Florence Kelley wrote:

> Of all the obstacles to labor legislation, for women and minors, none equals in effectiveness the judicial obstacle, using the word judicial in its wildest

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[27] A. Mitchell Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" *Forum* 63 (1920), p. 180.
[28] Stanley A. Coben, *Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Josephus Daniels, *The Wilson Era: Years of War and After, 1917-1923* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946),

> possible sense. If the consequences were less evil, the story would afford elements of humor.[29]

The consequences of the "judicial obstacle" meant that twenty-five percent of the decade's strikes were met with injunctions.[30] The Great Railroad Strike of 1922, a nationwide 400,000-person work stoppage, provoked anti-labor Attorney General Harry Daugherty to intervene on behalf on business interests. Daugherty traveled to Chicago to meet with James Wilkerson, a federal judge appointed by President Harding. Wilkerson issued an injunction outlawing picketing, "loitering and congregating" near railroad facilities, communication about the strike between workers or from their union, and the use of union funds to support strike activities.[31] Daugherty assigned all 5,000 U.S. deputy marshals throughout the country to enforce the orders from the court, which became known as the "Daugherty Injunction."[32] The state justified its militaristic approach to labor disputes by portraying unions as organizations of dangerous radicals who were capable of violent revolution.

Business also enjoyed the continued support from the Supreme Court. President Harding's four appointees shared many of his *laissez-faire* views, which resulted in a conservative voting bloc.[33] During a forty-year period known as the

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[29] Florence Kelley, "Judicial Obstacles to Labor Legislation," (1924), Box 9, Florence Kelley Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, New York, NY.
[30] William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 158.
[31] Colin John Davis, *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 131.
[32] While these injunctions kept workers from holding onto the gains made during the war, they also prompted concerns about judicial corruption. According to William Forbath, many lawyers and social reformers argued, "the courts were squandering their own legitimacy." See Forbath, p. 159.
[33] Harding appointed President William Howard Taft, George Sutherland, Pierce Butler, and Edward Terry Sanford to the Supreme Court. While Taft and Sanford both died in 1930, Sutherland and Butler were half of the conservative bloc nicknamed the "Four Horsemen" that successfully

Lochner Era, lasting from the late-1890s until the mid-1930s, the Supreme Court aggressively struck down progressive legislation. Key legal historians and scholars have argued that the pro-business justices who dominated the court let their personal beliefs and professional ties impact their rulings. For example, Justice Rufus Wheeler Peckham, who served on the court from 1895 until his death in 1909 and wrote the majority opinion in *Lochner v. New York*, had close relationships with industrialists like Cornelius Vanderbilt and John D. Rockefeller. While in private practice, Justice Willis Van Devanter worked for Union Pacific Railroad, and he continually ruled on behalf of employers. Often citing the right of "liberty of contact," the politically and economically conservative Court declared minimum wages, maximum hours, and laws against child labor and yellow dog contracts unconstitutional, easily reversing the effects of years of activism that led to the creation of these laws.[34]

The Lochner Era was named after a 1905 ruling that limited the rights of states to pass progressive labor laws for thirty years. *Lochner v. New York,* an appeal from bakery owner Joseph Lochner, challenged the New York law limiting work hours. In 1902, Lochner either required or allowed an employee to work over the sixty hours permitted in the New York bakeshop law.[35] While only a misdemeanor, he was arrested by the police and indicted by a grand jury. Because he planned for his case to challenge the maximum hour law, Lochner refused to issue a plea and

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challenged many New Deal policies. See William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn: The Constitutional Revolution in the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[34] James W. Ely, Jr., "Rufus W. Peckham and Economic Liberty," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 62 (March 2009), pp. 591–638; Henry J. Abraham, *Justices and Presidents: A Political History of Appointments to the Supreme Court,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[35] This was not his first conviction for breaking the 60-hour workweek legislation. He had been fined $25 in 1901 and paid.

presented no defense. The judge had "no choice but to find him guilty and sentence him to pay fifty dollars or spend fifty days in jail."[36] Lochner's lawyer filed an appeal the day his client was convicted, and after losing two appeals, his case reached the Supreme Court.[37]

In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled in favor of Lochner, citing the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.[38] After the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868, so many lawyers and judges used the due process clause to invalidate state laws that critics claimed it was tantamount to a "judicial veto" over states' legislation. Florence Kelley said:

> The Fourteenth Amendment intended to preserve life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for Colored people has not been allowed to do that. Since its adoption Negroes have been burned, hanged, robbed, and disenfranchised, while the Amendment has been used to block industrial legislation for women and girls and children, white and colored alike.[39]

The Court ruled that state and federal labor standards impeded an individual's ability to work. If a worker entered into a contract with their employer to work over the state-determined maximum hours, it was unconstitutional to void that contract. The result was that maximum hour laws and minimum wage laws were declared unconstitutional at different times during first decades of the 1900s. For example, in 1923, the Supreme Court restated their continued support of liberty of contract when the *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* ruling declared minimum wage laws

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[36] Paul Kens, *Lochner v. New York*: *Economic Regulation on Trial* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), p. 91.
[37] *Lochner v. New York,* 198 U.S. 45 (1905).
[38] The due process clause reads as, No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.
[39] Florence Kelley, "Social Standards in Industry: Progress of Labor Legislation for Women," (1923), Box 10, Kelley Papers.

unconstitutional. The Supreme Court upheld the legality of yellow-dog contracts during the Lochner Era in 1908 and again in 1915.[40]

The pro-business rulings by the Court were controversial and received criticism. One notable critic was Roscoe Pound, who later served as Dean of Harvard Law School. Pound claimed that the court cases ruling in favor of Liberty of Contract were misinterpretations of the Constitution. He argued that the court was willfully basing their decisions upon the notion of equality between those who enter into a contract, but the relationship between employee and employer was unequal, as "everyone acquainted first hand with actual industrial conditions" was well aware. Liberty of Contract privileged the employer at the expense of the employee.[41] While the Supreme Court continued to side with business, many northern states continued to pass laws offering their workers greater protection and setting the stage for clashes between lawmakers and the courts.

Capital Flight

For those businesses wanting to escape the reach of organized labor, the increasing pressure of pro-labor legislation, and protective legislation for women and children, the American South provided a haven. Due to its social behaviors supporting employers and an underdeveloped culture of resistance, the socio-political landscape of the South was favorable to business. Few industries fled the Northeast more quickly than textiles. In 1840, the South had less than 200,000

[40] *Adair v. United States*, 208 U.S. 161 (1908) and *Coppage v. Kansas*, 236 U.S. 1 (1915). Yellow-dog contracts were not banned until the Norris-LaGuardia Act in 1932.
[41] Roscoe Pound, "Liberty of Contract," *Yale Law Journal* 18, no. 7 (May 1909), pp. 454-487

active cotton spindles, but by 1920, they had over fifteen million.[42] Southern politicians and business leaders encouraged the flight of capital to the region with pledges to keep industry unregulated and unorganized. North Carolina led the region with the most mills, followed by South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. Tennessee and Texas also had a significant number of mills, though not on the same scale.

Southern states often competed with each other in the recruitment of northern industry. For example, in 1919, Alabama Power, one of the state's most powerful businesses, wrote a pamphlet aimed at enticing northern textile manufacturers to shift their production to their state. The pamphlet read, "The mills in the New England States operated chiefly on a 48-hour basis, while the mills in the cotton growing states operated largely between 54 and 60 hours a week." Additionally, they boasted of the lack of labor strife in the South, proclaiming, "Probably the greatest factor in the development of cotton manufacturing in Alabama has been the presence of an adequate supply of native labor which cotton mill operatives have found to be particularly well adapted to the textile industry." Politicians, boosters, and industrialists linked the southern population with "reliability, industry, tractability, and high intelligence."[43]

Alabama Power emphasized the great availability of poor southerners who would be content with wages much lower and hours much longer than northern mill workers. Written at the height of the anti-immigration frenzy, the company chose to

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[42] Elizabeth H. Davidson, *Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939).
[43] Commercial Department of Alabama Power Company, *Alabama Power Pamphlet on Alabama Textiles* (1919), Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham, AL.

highlight the state's native-born population, who were unlikely to be sympathetic to union organizers.[44] In 1920, just over two percent of Alabama's population was foreign-born, while in both Massachusetts and New York, over sixty percent of the state's residents were immigrants. While citing American exceptionalism as the key reason that native-born southerners made for better workers, Alabama Power appealed to northern industrialists' covert racism and anti-immigrant bigotry.

Northern business also appreciated that the South institutionalized sweatshop standards through law and practice. Local officials did not regulate night work, minimum wages, or factory working conditions.[45] In 1927, journalist Paul Blanshard found that "legally North Carolina and Georgia have the sixty-hour week, South Carolina the fifty-five-hour week and Alabama has no limit."[46] Poor conditions drew the eye of the National Consumers' League, who investigated the labor laws in twelve Southern states and subsequently distributed their findings. The NCL found that Alabama, Florida, and the Carolinas had no laws to ensure proper ventilation or cleaning. Other states' labor laws were vague at best including Tennessee's ambiguous "safe guards on machines so far as practical."[47]

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[44] Women's organizations, such as the WTUL and NCL, and labor unions tried to help organize the South. During the 1929 strike in Tennessee, the WTUL's Philadelphia chapter launched a fundraising drive to raise 50,000 dollars for strike relief and support by selling "thousands of little pins depicting a spinning wheel, bearing the slogan 'Organize the South." See National Women's Trade Union League, *Life and Labor Bulletin* 7, no. 8 (July 1929), p. 2. Organizing drives were met with little success, though southern textile workers participated in a number of strikes in 1929, leading up to the textile workers strike of 1934, the largest in the American history with 400,000 millhands.
[45] Marcia Harris, *Mill Women and the Great General Strike of 1934* (MA thesis, University of Alabama, 1978) Archive of American Minority Cultures, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL (hereafter AMC Archive).
[46] Paul Blanshard, *Labor in Southern Cotton Mills* (New York: New Republic Press, 1927), p. 8, Pamphlet Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (hereafter WI Pamphlets).
[47] Sweet Briar College Department of Economics, *Labor Laws of Twelve Southern States* (New York: National Consumers' League, 1934), Alabama State Archives, Montgomery, AL.

Many politicians and civic leaders often declared the sacredness of white womanhood, but they chose not to adopt laws that would protect white, working-class women from conditions dangerous to their health. Protective legislation case did not apply to the majority of women working in southern textile mills. Unlike most of the states in the North, Midwest, and West, many southern states had no limit to the hours that women worked. In the late Twenties, all of the southern textile states allowed twelve-hour night shifts for women. [48]

While conditions had improved for many women during and after the Progressive Era, the southern textile industry was resistant to progressive reforms. Female millhands were rarely given an opportunity to transition into a higher paying job with more authority, and had very little autonomy to manage their time while at work. For example, Katherine Copeland made roughly fifteen cents an hour at the Dwight Manufacturing Company in Alabama. She took home nine dollars for a sixty-hour week after taxes and deductions for her smocks, insurance, and any needles that she broke while working on the looms.[49] With her paycheck, she was able to compliment her husband's income, which also came from the mill.

The Katherine Copelands of the South worked in textile mills operating unsafe machines, working long hours, and enduring poor treatment from supervisors. Copeland's story was a common one in the Deep South; she started working at the mill when she was fifteen years old and continued for over forty years. Her mother started working in a mill when she was nine years old and

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[48] Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Norton, 1994).
[49] It was typical for New Jersey female textile mill workers to earn between $15 and 19 an hour. See Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States: Volume 10: The TUEL, 1925-1929 (*New York: International Publishers, 1994), p. 143.

expected her children to take over for her one day. Copeland took short breaks when she gave birth to each of her two sons, but most of her life was spent laboring in the mill.[50] Unlike her northern counterparts, Copeland's access to leisure activities were extremely limited and were usually centered around sitting on her front porch with family members.

In the 1920s, most southern textile workers earned approximately half the wages of the their northern counterparts. These low wages were part of the enticement of northern industrialists. Local officials and civic leaders did not think they were exploitive, however, because they claimed the cost of living was so low in the South, though they neglected to acknowledge the extremely rudimentary existence that low wages afforded workers. They also pointed to the cheap mill villages where companies often required workers to live as a cost-saving measure. In 1920, Paul Blanshard compared the annual cost of living for a family of five in Massachusetts and South Carolina to determine if this was true. He found that while the expenses for families in both states were quite similar, "southerners actually had higher costs."[51] Activists like Blanshard hoped to disrupt the narrative of affordable living in the South that industrialists and politicians had constructed to support low wages for southern workers.

Despite the grim life of a southern industrial worker, southern communities and local politicians usually welcomed mills and factories with open arms. The companies promised a better life for workers. According to Michelle Brattain,

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[50] Katherine Copeland, interviewed by author, Alabama City, AL, January 6, 2006.
[51] Blanshard calculated the numbers "giv[ing] the Southern manufacturers every benefit of the doubt concerning their claims of a very low cost of living in the Southern mill village.

"White southerners seemed to have internalized the belief that the creation of jobs was as much a public service as it was a profit-seeking venture."[52] However, if any promise ever existed, it was short lived. New factories and mills with state of the art equipment and mill towns with decent housing and public libraries quickly gave way to unsafe working and living conditions as they aged without updates. Once mills were institutionalized within the South, these workspaces quickly deteriorated to sweatshops in order to maximize profits. Many politicians, such as Governor Braxton Comer of Alabama, owned textile mills themselves and were able to enact laws limited workers' ability to engage in collective action. Local politicians chose to maximize their profits at any cost through the implementation of southern sweatshops.

In 1896, Dwight Manufacturing Company became one of the first New England cotton textile companies to open a mill in the South. Headquartered in Massachusetts, Dwight sought to take advantage of the pro-business climate in Alabama. When Dwight announced the location of the new $500,000 mill, the company's treasurer, J. Warren Nichols, said it was due the "restrictive labor laws on Massachusetts" that limited weekly work hours to fifty-eight.[53] Despite Massachusetts' labor laws, Dwight was highly profitable, and in 1920, their assets totaled over seven million dollars.[54] Even with such high profits, Dwight chose to close operations in Massachusetts and shift its entire production to the South. In 1927, the company closed its Massachusetts mills and shifted its entire operation

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[52] Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South (*Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 34.
[53] "A Big Southern Cotton Mill," *New York Times*, 12 December 1894.
[54] *America's Textile Reporter: For the Combined Textile Industries* 36, Issue 7 (1922).

south. They attributed this decision to the unions and labor laws that "pushed" them out, and the lack of southern regulation that "pulled" them in. According to Beth English, many other large textile companies chose the same path, shifting all or most of their production to the South, "recogniz[ing] that the highest profits could be made in the underdeveloped, overwhelmingly rural South where surplus labor was abundant, opportunities for gainful employment few, and labor was cheap and unorganized."[55] While industry earned high profits in northern cities with higher labor costs, more regulation, and active unions, they recognized the opportunities that the South represented.

Because owners preferred not to incur the expenses, conditions in textile mills were dangerous and unsanitary. While mills occasionally were subject to inspections, supervisors received advance notice. Even with time to prepare, an inspector for the Department of Labor Women's Bureau gave this description of an Alabama textile mill in 1925:

> The lint was thick in the air, the floors slippery and oily. The aisles were extremely narrow and machinery crowded. There was low overhead shafting and no guards on the transmission machinery. The noise was tremendous and the vibrations so great as to shake the floor constantly. Wrapping paper was tacked by the girls over the windows on the east side to eliminate the glare. There were no seats whatever. The drinking facilities were a pail and dipper in the toilet room. The toilet plumbing was out of order and was flushed by a janitor with a bucket two or three times a day.[56]

These unsanitary conditions led to chronic health conditions, such as lung ailments due to breathing cotton dust. One particular disease, byssinosis, more commonly known as "brown lung," led to shortness of breath, asthma, and coughing. Left

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[55] English, *A Common Thread,* p. 2.
[56] United States Women's Bureau, *Women in Alabama Industries: A Study of Hours, Wages and Working Conditions*, (Washington DC: G.P.O., 1924), AMC Archive.

untreated, the ailment turned to emphysema, bronchitis, and respiratory and heart failure. While the first recorded case of brown lung was in 1731, which linked the disease to textile work, it was not until the 1940s and '50s that researchers began to recommend better ventilation to reduce the impact of breathing cotton fibers.[57]

Mill owners regularly neglected to ensure that machinery was up to date and well maintained. The decision to place production costs above workers' health resulted in frequent injuries. In 1918, one Alabama textile manufacturer reported four or five daily accidents among textile workers. The reported accidents ranged from crushing a finger to losing a hand. Workers received treatment from company doctors who recommended recovery times to their managers. Most of the injured were out of work from anywhere between three days and six months, with most being out for about a week.[58] Katherine Copeland remembered getting too close to the overhead belts, which tore her skirt off. She was embarrassed, but mostly happy to escape injury since an accident like that could have cost her legs.

Southern textile mills reflect most scholarly definitions of sweatshops.[59] Regional realities opened the door to a stark return to oppressive workplace conditions that included among others - long and arduous hours of toil, incessant safety concerns that witnessed life-altering workplace injuries, a peasant's pay and virtually no place to turn for redress. The regional isolation prevented communication and organizing with workers in other states. Early 20th century

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[57] D. Clayton Brown, *King Cotton in Modern America: A Cultural, Political, and Economic History Since 1945* (Oxford: University of Mississippi, 2010).
[58] Tallassee Falls Manufacturing Company, "Accident Reports, 1918." Tallassee Falls Manufacturing Company Records, 1909-1973. Alabama State Archives. Montgomery, AL.
[59] Stein, *Out of the Sweatshop*; Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*; Bender, *Sweated Work, Weak Bodies*.

gendered and racial hierarchies resulted in distinct occupations specific to certain populations. White men received the more lucrative jobs, while white women and children received the more tedious and low-paying jobs and endured frequent sexual harassment, and sometimes even sexual assault, in order to keep their jobs. African-American men were only employed as manual laborers, doing work like hauling raw cotton. African-American women were excluded from textile work for the most part, aside from performing custodial duties, such as sweeping and scrubbing toilets.[60] Manufacturers also saw African-American southerners as possible strikebreakers, using institutionalized and individual racism to their advantage.

Child Labor

Southern mills subjected thousands of white families to sweatshop conditions, often requiring children to work as a condition of their parents' employment. In fact, it was an accepted practice to evict the residents of a mill village – where workers were often required to live – if the children did not report to work. However, this practice was not overly common as most children automatically worked. Children comprised a significant portion of the industrial workforce in the first decades of the 20th century, particularly in the South. While northern children only made up six percent of the textile workforce, southern children comprised almost a quarter of their region's textile workers. Closely connected to high child labor numbers was an unusually high illiteracy rate amongst

[60] It was not until the 1960s and '70s that African-American women gained access to production jobs in the mills, and it was at that point that the South began to deindustrialize. See Timothy Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

southern youth. Many northern states had passed legislation that prevented young teenagers from working in factories and mines, but the South used their lax standards as an enticement for northern capital.

Anti-child labor reformers adapted their message to appeal to white southerners as they spoke of the "racial uplift" needed to keep white children from degrading themselves in mills.[61] Edgar Murphy, an Episcopalian priest, formed the Alabama Child Labor Committee (ACLC) in 1901 to expose the conditions in textile mills where children worked. Framing child labor in mills as the South's failure to care of their own, he urged state governments to protect white native-born children as northern states protected foreign-born children. At the 1903 meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, Murphy said:

> The children of the northern mills — as Miss [Jane] Addams could inform you — are largely the children of the foreigner. If the northern states can legislate to protect the children of the foreigner, surely we can legislate to protect the children of the south. I speak not in jealousy of the foreigner — God forbid — but I dare not speak in forgetfulness of our own, of the children of' these humbler people of our southern soil — a people native to our section and our interests, of our own race and blood.[62]

While he believed southern politicians ought to defend children by passing protective legislation, he also blamed the northern owners of textile mills. Indeed, Murphy maintained that northern-owned mills in Alabama employed more than

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[61] Shelley Sallee, *The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

[62] Edgar Gardner Murphy, Speech at National Conference of Charities and Corrections (1903). Accessed from (http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/organizations/national-child-labor-committee/)

twice the number of children under the age of twelve as those owned by southerners.[63]

While Alabama had been a pioneer in the fight against child labor, passing legislation in 1887 regulating the conditions of children under the age of eighteen, its success was short lived. In 1894, a bill was introduced to make an exception for Etowah county, which was quickly amended to apply to the whole state. In 1895, Dwight Manufacturing Company began their operations in Etowah County. Southern politicians prioritized the recruitment of northern capital over the well-being of poor, white children.

Anti-child labor activists, including Murphy and Florence Kelley, formed the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) in 1904 in order to pressure the government to pass legislation keeping children out of factories. They highlighted the results from the 1900 Census proving about one out of every six children between the ages of five and ten worked for wages in the United States. During the 1909 National Conference on Charities and Correction, one NCLC activist pointed to the rampant child labor in the southern oyster packing, cigar, and textile industries, arguing, "There is no possible excuse for such wholesale abuse of childhood."[64] The group hired photographer Lewis Hine to photograph child workers, and his images tugged at the heartstrings of the public. While many Americans supported child

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[63] Edgar Gardner Murphy, *Child Labor in Alabama: An Appeal to the People and Press of New England* (Alabama: Alabama Child Labor Committee, 1901), WI Pamphlets. The ACLC distributed over 28,000 pamphlets in the years leading up to the formation of the national organization.
[64] "Rabbi Attacks Carnegie: We Need Justice More than Libraries, He Tells Charities Conference," *New York Times,* 14 June 1909.

labor on family farms, they were horrified by the images of small, dirty children working for paltry wages in dangerous mills, mines, and factories.

Public exposure to child labor during the Progressive Era helped the NCLC to recruit new allies to include consumers, clergy, and sympathetic politicians. They worked with the government to establish a Children's Bureau within the Department of Labor in 1912, introduce anti-child labor bills to Congress, and pass laws at the state level. The number of children wage earners between the ages of ten and sixteen dropped by one million in the years between 1910 and 1920. By the end of the decade, over half of the states had implemented the standards from the federal legislation which the to a steep decline of child labor.

Powerful corporate interests and the Supreme Court kept the group from making many tangible gains at a national level. After years of pressure from the NCLC and the NCL and with the support of President Wilson, Congress passed a bill in 1916 prohibiting the sale of goods made by children over state lines. The Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional, provoking the criticism of many who considered child labor to be morally reprehensible. In his dissent, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "But if there is any matter upon which civilized countries have agreed…it is the evil of premature and excessive child labor."[65] Six years later, both houses of Congress approved the Child Labor Amendment, in order to regulate or prohibit work for individuals under the age of eighteen.[66] However, only six states ratified it between 1924 and 1933, pointing to the necessity of state

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[65] *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, 247 U.S. 251 (1918) (dissenting opinion)

[66] The amendment states, "The Congress shall have power to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age." As of 2012, this bill is still pending. It would need an additional ten states' approval for ratification.

legislation.[67] Over half of the states had adopted standards prohibiting the worst forms of child labor by 1924, but only a few were located in the South.

Southern politicians proclaimed "states' rights" in defense of their actions. In reality though, they were, among some of the worst offenders, often profiting off of child labor in their own textile mills. In 1897, Braxton Bragg Comer built Avondale Mills just outside of Birmingham, Alabama and became governor nine years later. Historian Wayne Flint writes that Comer employed more children in his Avondale mills than any other state industrialist.[68] He also contributed money to the textile manufacturer's efforts to block child labor reform and was, according to Edgar Murphy, "the most bitter opponent of child labor legislation I have ever known." When pushed for tougher laws, some southern governors offered excuses such as, "Do you want to compromise or to arrest the prosperity of the South?" and "do you not know that this child-labor law is an attack upon business?"[69] Others disdained child labor, but believed they had to allow it in order to curry favor with both northern and southern industrialists.

In 1909, Louisiana Governor Jared Sanders invited manufacturers, union organizers, and anti-child labor activists to a conference in New Orleans with the goal of setting a standardized child labor law for all southern states. Sanders specifically requested the attendance of each southern governor or their chosen delegates, and all complied aside from the governors from Texas and Alabama. According to the social work journal *The Survey*, Alabama Governor Comer

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[67] Florence Taylor, *Child Labor Fact Book, 1900-1950* (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1950).
[68] Wayne Flint, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).
[69] Edgar Gardner Murphy, Speech at National Conference of Charities and Corrections.

explained his absence saying, "Alabama already had the best child labor law in the country with the possible exception of Massachusetts," although his absence actually drew further "attention upon the deficiencies of the Alabama law."[70]

By creating a uniform standard for the South, individual states would not compete for industries by promising lax standards for child labor. The conference almost unanimously adopted ten resolutions, including a minimum employment age of fourteen and a maximum fifty-four-hour workweek. They also declared "an eight-hour day for children under sixteen, and women, is the only humane standard."[71] Included in the series of resolutions was a proposal for strict and costly penalties for those who failed to enforce the labor laws. However, without full support of the all of the southern states, anti-child labor governors could not adopt the resolutions and compete with officials in other states who supported child labor and would use it to recruit northern investments. Few states adopted any of the resolutions and children continued to work in many southern industries. The conference provided a clear example of the ways in which business interests tied politicians' hands to achieve progressive reform. While activists were unable to achieve legislative gains in the South during the Progressive Era, they had greater success creating a culture that frowned on child labor.

Activists had fought against businesses' exploitation of children since the early 1900s and successfully swayed public opinion. By the 1920s, many Americans wanted to see an end to child labor. They believed that a child's rightful place was at

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[70] "Southern Child Labor Conference," *The Survey* 22 (New York: Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, 1909), p. 107.
[71] Ibid., p. 107.

school and home with their families. Some politicians and manufacturers agreed, but their efforts were blunted by the tremendous power of the conservative Supreme Court and the South. As long as southern states served as havens to corporations desiring to maximize their profits, children endured fourteen-hour-workdays, meager wages, dangerous machinery, and minimal opportunities for education and advancement.

In 1930, the Massachusetts Consumers League identified the return of the sweatshop to their state, citing low wages, mandatory and frequent overtime, the use of toxic chemicals, inadequate toilet facilities, and long hours.[72] Two years later, New England textile magnates encouraged Massachusetts Governor Joseph Ely to place a moratorium on the law prohibiting night work for women textile workers in order to "meet southern competition."[73] Ely claimed that restrictive labor laws had played a part in the state's depression as industrialists sought "cheap labor" elsewhere. Workers and their allies condemned this proposal, writing that:

> When the Governor of what is reputed to be the most enlightened commonwealth in America gets up on the public platform and says that because we cannot compete with the labor conditions of the hill-billies[sic] we may drop down to their level of labor laws, he make a pitiable confession of short-sidedness.[74]

The South appealed to the "race to the bottom" outlook of many northern businessmen, leaving all workers vulnerable to their search for higher profits. As the threat of capital flight manifested, it became clear that no workers were safe

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[72] Consumers' League of Massachusetts, "Three Years of Anti-Sweatshop Work," Folder 478, Box 25, *Schlesinger Library,* Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter referred to as CL of M Records).
[73] Edwin S. Smith, "Press Release – November 19, 1932," Folder 479, Box 25, CL of M Records.
[74] "White Flag," Misc. Newspaper Clippings (1932), Folder 479, Box 25, CL of M Records.

from sweatshops. The activists who had achieved tangible reforms one decade earlier had been pushed back to the margins due to repression from industrial elites and political and justice systems working on their behalf. Despite the setbacks, activists found ways to remain vigilant and challenge sweatshops and their purveyors.

Labor Colleges

Both the WTUL and the NCL continued their activism into the 1920s, but they were unable to appeal to the mainstream as they had previously. In the last years of the 1910s, the WTUL worked with female factory workers who held jobs in productions during World War I. Seeing the need for wage-earning women to become empowered within the labor movement, the WTUL worked with the NCL to found the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in 1921. Located at Bryn Mawr, an elite college for women, the school educated around 1,700 blue-collar female workers over seventeen summers until its closing in 1938. Historians have placed the Bryn Mawr School within a larger movement of labor education to teach workers the skills to challenge their employers.[75] These institutions provided students the opportunity to learn from each other and grow together across class lines during the stagnant years of the Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover administrations. Because of its relationship to the WTUL and the NCL, Bryn Mawr was one of the few schools that was only open to female workers. The program, an

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[75] Karyn L. Hollis, *Liberating Voices: Writing at the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2004); Richard J. Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Charles F. Howlett, *Brookwood Labor College and the Struggle for Peace and Social Justice in America,* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993).

eight-week course in liberal arts and labor economics, was open to women of all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.[76] Every summer, the program admitted one-hundred students between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, had at least three year of "wage-earning experience, two of which must have been in industry," and could read and write in English.[77]

Female workers developed their skills as writers and speakers, and many returned to work at the end of summer and took on leadership roles, such as shop steward. The students heard lectures by Margaret Sanger, W.E.B. Dubois, Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Reuther, and Frances Perkins, visited Philadelphia museums and factories, and learned from a non-hierarchical feminist pedagogy. Following the success at Bryn Mawr, faculty and staff who had been trained there founded similar programs in other parts of the country. Johns Hopkins economics professor and Bryn Mawr instructor Broadus Mitchell wrote a pamphlet entitled, "How to Start Workers' Study Classes: A Primer to Promote Workers' Education" to help others form other programs.[78] Much like Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, which trained several generations of labor and civil rights leaders, schools like Brookwood Labor College, Wisconsin Summer School, and Southern Summer School gave its students and faculty the tools necessary to be effective agents for social change. According to Rita Heller, "In the politically quiet 1920s, the School thus kept alive a commitment to peaceful social change, grooming many of its participants for the

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[76] Starting in 1926, the summer school recruited and admitted African-American women, predating the integration of Bryn Mawr.

[77] Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in Industry Pamphlet (1929), Mary Cornelia Barker Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University (hereafter Barker Papers).

[78] Broadus Mitchell, "How to Start Workers' Study Classes: A Primer to Promote Workers' Education" Workers' Education Pamphlet Series, no. 1 (New York: Workers Education Bureau of America, 1925).

recharged world of FDR and serving as a bridge to the later era."[79] Radical educator Paulo Freire wrote that activists must ask themselves "what can we do now in order to be able to do tomorrow what we are unable to do today?"[80] Activists answered that question with education and training. Instead of lamenting about the poor conditions for organizing, thousands of middle and working-class women received training, developed skills, and forged networks that would be invaluable in the next decade.

Conclusion

The events of the late 1910s and Twenties served as a form of backlash to the progressive policies and sympathetic consumer society that groups like the WTUL and the NCL had fought for. The Red Scare repressed leftist voices, deporting many and silencing others. Unions were tarnished with the label of anti-Americanism. The Supreme Court used their judicial power to uphold corporate dominance. The South offered its women, men, and children as cheap labor to investors and industrialists, undercutting those companies that chose to remain in the North, with its regulation, unions, and labor laws. Even in the midst of this decade of suppression, anti-sweatshop activists found ways to organize for the future through the labor colleges. My next chapter examines the reemergence of a mainstream movement for worker justice. Organizations and coalitions formed to resist sweatshop conditions, as well as fascism and white supremacy, during the Great Depression. As they had in the

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[79] Rita R. Heller, "The Women of Summer: The Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, 1921-1938" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1986), p. 275.
[80] Paulo Freire and Ana Maria Araujo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy Of The Oppressed* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 108.

Progressive Era, women were instrumental in organizing consumers to make ethical purchasing decisions.

CHAPTER THREE

"Buy Conscious with the League of Women Shoppers": Consumers Organizing for Worker Justice during the Great Depression

In December 1934, workers at Ohrbach's and Klein's department stores in New York City went on strike, demanding a pay raise, a forty-hour work week, and an end to discrimination for union activity. The striking workers were unable to shut down the stores, and the New York Supreme Court granted Ohrbach's an anti-picketing injunction.[1] The Department Store Employees Union requested help on the picket lines, and liberal and radical activists responded immediately. The injunction required that police allow no more than three pickets at a time in front of the stores preventing strikers and activists from being effective since their goal was to encourage potential shoppers to stay away from Ohrbach's during the labor dispute. Whenever more than three people walked on the line, the police responded with violence and arrests. During the five-month strike, two groups were able to stave off the police in order to maintain an effective demonstration. One, a group of Catholic nuns and priests, carried signs with messages that blessed the labor struggled with diving support, stating "God Supports the Strikers." The other was a group called the League of Women's Shoppers. Harry Fisher, a member of the Young Communist League who would later fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War, was marching on the unlawfully large picket line one Saturday morning in the spring of 1935 when he saw a Rolls Royce stop at the store. Fisher remembered that:

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[1] "125 Pickets Seized At Ohrbach Store," *New York Times,* 17 February 1935.

> Immediately the police rushed over to make a path through the picket line for these obviously wealthy shoppers. One chauffeur opened the door for the two women inside; yet another chauffeur opened the trunk of the car—and out came picket signs asking the public to support the strikers. The two women, picket signs in hand, represented the League of Women Shoppers, they told us, and they walked in line with us, calling on bystanders to join us.[2]

Members of the League of Women Shoppers carried signs that bore messages such as "This dress was not bought at Ohrbach's where 45 employees are locked out" and "Use your buying power for justice."[3] While the nuns claimed to have God on their side, the League had celebrity and glamour. The police backed down in both cases, which allowed strikers and their allies to continue pressuring the department store to improve conditions for workers. In his memoirs, Fisher wrote that the labor movement and its allies "had a deep sense of comradeship, of solidarity. I guess we knew that our unity made us strong."[4]

In 1935, a small group of women founded the League of Women Shoppers (LWS) in the midst of the Ohrbach's strike. Realizing the importance of prestige for their organization, the LWS recruited membership or alliances with nationally recognized figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Ida Tarbell, and Lillian Hellman.[5] Over the next decade, the group became a strong ally for labor as the members used their power as consumers to highlight workers' struggles. Through its slogan, "Use your

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[2] Harry Fisher, *Comrades: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 11.
[3] Therese Mitchell, "Photograph of Ohrbach's Strike," 1935, Labor Arts Project at New York University http://www.laborarts.org/collections/item.cfm?itemid=321 (accessed August 10, 2012).
[4] Fisher, *Comrades,* p. 12.
[5] Hoping to persuade famed reformer and journalist Ida Tarbell to lend her name to the letterhead, LWS acting secretary Rebecca Ducker connects the group's mission to Tarbell's interests. Drucker also cites the prestigious names already associated with the group, such as Suzanne LaFollette, Ruth Pickering Pinchot, and Mrs. Arthur Garfield Hays, who would become the first president of the LWS. Tarbell wrote back that because she could not actively commit to the LWS, she could not allow her name to be used on the letterhead. Rebecca Drucker, "Letter from Rebecca Ducker to Ida M. Tarbell, April 29, 1935," Reel # 03.1022.00, Ida M. Tarbell Collection, Special Collections Pelletier Library at Allegheny College, Meadville, PA (hereafter Tarbell Collection).

buying power for justice," the LWS sought to mobilize middle-class and wealthy women as socially active consumers, reaching a membership of 25,000 in cities as diverse as Miami, Minneapolis, and Columbus. The current scholarship places the LWS as part of a revival of Progressive Era consumer activism, following in the footsteps of the National Consumers' League and to a lesser extent, the Women's Trade Union League.[6] While a number of historians have written about the LWS, little attention has been paid to the chapters outside of the Northeast. Although many chapters were in the Northeast, and the national office operated out of New York, over half were in the Midwest, West, and South.[7] Made up of approximately twenty separate local chapters, the LWS developed a diverse set of campaigns specific to local chapters. The LWS conducted investigations into labor disputes, produced propaganda tailored to their supporters, and developed campaigns around local and national labor issues.

The LWS appealed to progressives committed to broader concepts of justice as well as women who were new to activism. It believed that housewives and professional workingwomen not involved in "public problems" were out of step with the shifting social landscape.[8] The LWS argued that women had a responsibility to address social and economic problems and to combat them with their purchasing power. As historian Landon Storrs writes in *Civilizing Capitalism*,

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[6] Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism*; Glickman, *Buying Power;* Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*; Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic.*

[7] The following cities organized LWS chapters: Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Columbus, OH; Detroit, MI; Hollywood, CA; Miami, FL; Minneapolis, MN; Nashville, TN; New York, NY; Newark, NJ; Oakland, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburg, PA; Portland, OR; San Diego, CA; San Francisco, CA; Santa Barbara, CA; Seattle, WA; St. Louis, MO; Washington, D.C.

[8] Anne Weiss, "Economic Duty Has No Limit: Playwright Tells about League Activity," *Pittsburgh Press*, 9 February 1939.

the project of consumer-driven activism of the 1930s was the "pursuit of a social democratic state."[9] As a prominent organization within the worker justice movement the group empowered thousands of socially aware consumers to act in solidarity with workers.

The New Deal

During the 1930s, a broad coalition of activists pressured the White House and Congress to protect communities and individuals from the harshest elements of unrestrained capitalism. With high unemployment rates, employers had access to a constant stream of people desperate for work. The New Deal provided a safety net for many Americans, breaking up some of the economic power that had been concentrated in the hands of the moneyed elite. Many members of Roosevelt's administration and his closest advisors were sympathetic to the plight of exploited workers. Perhaps most notable was Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, who had been an active ally to the working class for two decades leading up to the New Deal. Once a leader in the National Consumers League during the 1910s, she steadily shifted from community organizing to government positions during Roosevelt's New York governorship and subsequent presidency. Her long-standing commitment to workers secured labor as a strong contingent within the New Deal coalition.[10]

Perkins, along with other New Dealers, supported legislation that offered greater protection to workers and children, including minimum wage laws,

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[9] Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism,* p. 123.
[10] Kirstin Downey, *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR'S Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2009).

unemployment benefits, pensions for the elderly, a standardized forty-hour workweek, overtime laws, welfare for the poorest Americans, and laws against child labor. Some states had labor laws prior to the 1930s, but some addressed issues specific to women workers, while pro-business courts overruled others. Additionally, progressive New Dealers worked to protect freedom of association, guaranteeing workers the right to organize unions for the first time in American history.[11] While organizations had worked for years to abolish child labor and end sweatshops, FDR's administration pioneered in passing such sweeping legislation to benefit individual workers. Activists served as advisors to the Roosevelts, ensuring that proposed legislation remained worker-friendly. Rose Schneiderman, who organized garment workers in the Progressive Era and served as President of the Women's Trade Union League from 1926 until 1950, was a close friend and advisor to both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.[12] She influenced several pieces of legislation, including the Social Security and the Fair Labor Standards Acts. In fact, when speaking at the American Federation of Labor convention in 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt said that Schneiderman had taught her "all she knew about trade unionism."[13] The New Deal set standards for protecting a variety of American workers, and by doing so sent a message to employers that government officials would hold them accountable for maintaining those standards.

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[11] See *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism,* ed. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[12] Eleanor Roosevelt also was a member of the WTUL, lending legitimacy and prestige to the organization, even while the AFL began to withdraw their support. The AFL was committed to securing employment for men at the expense of women. See Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression:* Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997).
[13] Rose Schneiderman and Lucy Goldthwaite, *All for One* (New York: P.S. Eriksson, 1967), p. 251.

Many compromises were made in order to gain southern Democrats support for New Deal legislation. The most glaring set of compromises resulted in many basic protections deined to agricultural workers and domestic workers, who were primarily comprised of women, African Americans, and Latinos. Also, the creation of these laws did not necessarily improve conditions immediately, even for those who were covered. The Roosevelt administration received thousands of telegrams asking them for their assistance with greater enforcement of the new policies.[14] While conditions had improved for many workers throughout the first few decades of the 20th century, a number of industries remained resistant to change as employers neglected to honor new laws offering workers greater protection.

Sweated Labor in the 1930s

Throughout the 1930s, despite New Deal policies, many Americans labored in sweatshop conditions. Laundry, retail, and domestic work, which were among the few occupations open to marginalized workers, including women and people of color. Much like industrial sweatshops, these occupations offered few safety standards, poor pay, and long hours. The steam laundry industry, for example, employed large numbers of women and men in urban areas as middle-class Americans outsourced the time-consuming chore. According to historian Jenny Carson, "by the 1930s, more than [a] quarter of a million workers in the United States churned out sheets and garments for hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and individual customers, making the laundry industry one of the largest service

[14] Naomi E. Pasachoff, *Frances Perkins: Champion of the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

industries in the United States."[15] Workers had to adapt themselves to the machines and, while technology and mechanizations occasionally eased specific tasks, that benefit was negated by the burden of the speed up. Additionally, workers sustained injuries, such as burns and strained muscles from the repetitive motions. Dependence on machinery also led to "technical unemployment," the loss of good-paying jobs as the industry increasingly relied on machines and a de-skilled workforce.

The laundry industry had served as an icon of degraded work since the *Muller v. Oregon* decision discussed in Chapter One. It remained resistant to union organizing until the late 1930s. The League of Women Shoppers labeled it a "sweatshop industry" because of its unsanitary conditions, dangerous chemicals and machinery, long hours, poor pay, abusive management, and racial and gender discrimination.[16] While machines consistently generated dangerous heat and steam, few employers provided adequate ventilation. The extreme temperatures led to miserable workdays. In his dissertation on the steam laundry industry, Arwen Palmer Mohun writes:

> In the winter laundries were often icy cold until the machines got fired up. Many employers did not bother with heat since temperature did not affect the quality of the goods…in summer, high temperatures and humidity could be overwhelming. All agreed that heat was the worst part about laundry work.[17]

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[15] Jenny Carson, "'Taking on Corporate Bullies': Cintas, Laundry Workers, and Organizing in the 1930s and Twenty-First Century," *Labor Studies Journal* 35, no. 4 (September 2010), p. 456.
[16] Jane Filley and Therese Mitchell, *Consider the Laundry Workers*, (New York: League of Women Shoppers, 1937) Fromkin Memorial Collection, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, (hereafter referred to as Fromkin Collection), p. 52.
[17] Arwen Palmer Mohun, "Women, Work, and Technology: The Steam Laundry Industry in the United States and Great Britain, 1880-1920" (PhD Diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1992), p.117.

Because of poor ventilation, workers reported that temperatures easily reached 120 degrees in summer months.[18] These devastating conditions were typical of many urban laundries.

Retail work was another industry characterized as much by its unfavorable conditions as its high number of female employees. While department store clerks enjoyed a higher social standing than laundry and factory workers, they often received less pay and worked longer hours. Additionally, store policies often forced clerks to wear clothing sold where they worked.[19] Management spent up to $50,000 a year spying on their employees to prevent union organizing.[20] At age thirteen, Rose Schneiderman, who would become president of the WTUL, began working in a New York department store, but was happy to quit to work in a garment factory earning twice as much.[21] Despite the poor pay, department and five-and-dime stores served as major employers for wage-earning women. Woolworth alone employed 62,000 people in 1937. Not unlike the Wal-Marts and Dollar Stores of today, five-and-dime stores like Woolworth sold cheap goods to the working and middle class. Historian Dana Frank argues that they could afford low prices because,

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[18] Filley and Mitchell, *Consider the Laundry Workers,* p. 46, Fromkin Collection.
[19] Policies like this still are in effect in many retail stores. See Amy Merrick, "Dressing the Part Costly for Retail Clerks," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 2003.
[20] Daniel Opler, "On the Popular Front: New York City's Department Store Union Culture, 1937-1941," *Mickle Street Review,* no. 16 (September 2005), [e-journal] <http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu/archives/Issue%2016/essays/Opler.htm#_ftn2> (accessed June 16, 2012).
[21] Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 32.

in addition to low wages for their salespeople, "[management] became adept at sniffing out the products of sweated labor."[22]

These exploitive and anti-union conditions prompted socially conscious groups to conduct investigations. In the early 1900s, the Consumers League and the WTUL, along with liberal journalists, publicized the "bad lighting, inadequate ventilation, lack of seats, squalid toilet and lunchroom facilities" as well as the "long hours, extremely low pay, brutal and humiliating discipline, fines for infractions of rules, and prohibitions on the use of seats even when they were provided."[23] This last point referred to protective legislation that required employers to provide seating for female workers. But while many department and five-and-dime stores followed the letter of law by placing stools behind their counters, they prohibited workers from using them. An investigation conducted by the League of Women Shoppers in 1938 revealed that the Woolworth stores in New York regularly broke at least four labor laws regulating sanitary conditions, including the forbidden use of a common drinking glass. One employee reported, "Sixty girls drink out of one glass."[24] It was clear to workers that without enforcement, labor laws provided little relief from the tedious and dangerous conditions.

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[22] Dana Frank explores how Frank Woolworth pioneered the practice of directly sourcing the goods sold in his stores, dictating the terms of the prices and shipment dates. Upon discovering a German village of children and women working night and day to produce toys, Woolworth described them as "oppressed" and placed a major order, guaranteeing low prices for customers, enormous profit for Woolworth's shareholders, an continued sweated work for the German children. See Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), p. 65.

[23] Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 134.

[24] Therese Mitchell, *Consider the Woolworth Workers* (New York: League of Women Shoppers, Inc., 1940), Fromkin Collection, p. 34.

In 1930, over five million Americans were employed in domestic and personal service, a primary occupation for women of color for much of the 20th century.[25] Indeed, fifty-three percent of African-American wage-earning women were employed as domestic workers.[26] Employers, usually white, middle-class women, wanted to pay as little as possible, with some going so far to lament, "that the really good bargains were no more"[27] when they were unable to compel a domestic to work for as little as twenty-five cents an hour.[28] In addition to poor pay, domestics were expected to work past their scheduled hours if the assigned tasks were not completed. Katie Geneva Cannon, who worked as a domestic in the home of southern textile mill workers, said:

> They would pay you two dollars for two hours worth of work, but you had a list of things, and if it took you longer than that, that was your business. All the work they wanted you to do, you could never do in two hours. You had to wash the clothes, hang them on the line and iron them, wash the floors, do the things like clean the refrigerator or clean out the cabinets, and all these things you did to prove that you were worthy of the job. You never just did what you were asked. You always did a little extra.[29]

At the same time, Cannon cared for her employer's four children, leaving her little time with her own family.

The nature of the domestic work industry and the identities of its workforce created challenges for union organizers and socially conscious activists. Because the work occurred in millions of private homes, traditional union models failed. The

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[25] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population and Housing, 1930*, Table 12.
[26] David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
[27] Esther Gray, "Domestic Workers – Cheap," *The Woman Shopper* (1937), League of Women Shoppers Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA (hereafter referred to as LWS Papers).
[28] At the time, the Domestic Workers Union was advocating a forty-cent minimum wage.
[29] Victoria Morris Byerly, *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Womanhood and Poverty in the South* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 39.

desperation of huge numbers of impoverished women guaranteed employers domestic work for mere pennies, particularly during the Great Depression. In 1935 journalists used the term "slave market" to describe the informal spaces in the Bronx where prospective employers visited to hire a domestic.[30] That same year, domestic workers were excluded from the Social Security and the National Labor Relations Acts, which guaranteed many workers the right to form a union. Then, in 1938, domestic workers were among those excluded from the Fair Labor Standards Act, which provided retirement and unemployment benefits and guaranteed a minimum wage and overtime.

In each of these industries, the workforce was disproportionately made up of women, and women of color in the cases of laundry and domestic work. During the 1930s, women comprised approximately one quarter of all wage-earning workers. At the beginning of the decade only three percent of these women, or 260,000, were in unions, but over the course of the decade, despite intimidation by management, the percentage had doubled, and 800,000 women belonged to a union. That number continued to grow to three million during World War II and reached to 3.5 million by the mid-1950s as female workers sought to maximize their agency within the workplace.[31]

Popular Front

While the New Deal did not put an end to exploitation in the workplace, it did create a set of standards that activists could call upon when demanding employers

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[30] Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke, "The Slave Market," *The Crisis* 42 (Nov 1935).
[31] Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

treat workers fairly. Realizing that the White House could only provide limited support, workers looked elsewhere for allies. They appealed to activists for support during labor disputes. The anti-sweatshop organizations formed during the Progressive Era continued to campaign for worker justice, but some, like the WTUL, saw their numbers and resources dwindling as the Great Depression began. As the WTUL'S influence declined, younger progressive activists sought other avenues for participation in labor disputes. The 1930s provided a moment when progressive policies created space for the left to gain a foothold to pressure elected officials, industry, and consumers.

College students, artists, the unemployed, workers, and consumers organized against fascism, white supremacy, unrestrained capitalism, and militarism in the 1930s.[32] Playwright Arthur Miller, a student at the University of Michigan during the Depression, wrote that while previous generations of college students spent their time at football games with their fraternities, his cohort "thirsted for another kind of action, and we took great pleasure in the sit-down strikes in Flint and Detroit…We saw a new world coming every third morning."[33] Like Harry Fisher, who marched with workers in New York and later fought against fascists in Spain, they were committed to building a better world. Many left-leaning students, union organizers, civil rights activists, artists, writers, clergy, workers, and activists were

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[32] See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (New York: Grove Press, 1984); Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); James Lorence, *The Unemployed People's Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929-1941* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[33] Arthur Miller, "The University of Michigan," *Holiday Magazine* (December 1953), p. 70.

part of the Popular Front, the communist-sponsored, but not controlled, anti-fascist movement organized in 1935.

The Popular Front played a large role in labor disputes through their support of workers. Union membership was on the rise, particularly with the growing influence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Even though workers risked a great deal if they chose to join, many did anyway. CIO organizer Beatrice Lumpkin wrote:

> [In 1937], the labor movement was exploding with the energy of hope. Conditions were ripe for a huge increase in union membership. Communist-led hunger marches to state capitals had aroused the fighting spirit of working families. The veterans' Bonus March to Washington, DC radicalized thousands more…These struggles, and passage of fair labor laws, created a pro-union climate.[34]

The CIO's membership grew from four million in 1938 to six million in 1945. Considered more radical than AFL affiliates, CIO unions in the South struggled to navigate the racial tensions that were rampant in the textile industry. They achieved greater success in the Northeast and Midwest, wining union recognition within the automobile and steel industries. The CIO also sought to organize industries that employed marginalized workers such as the agricultural industry in the South.[35]

While the WTUL and the AFL failed to organize the laundry industry in during the early 1900s, by 1941, the majority of New York laundry workers

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[34] Beatrice Lumpkin, "Joy in the Struggle: My Life and Love," p. 56 [unpublished memoirs] Communist Party USA: http://www.cpusa.org/beatrice-lumpkin-offers-joy-to-cpusa-org-readers/ (Accessed September 12, 2012). Lumpkin was a life-long activist and took part in the unemployed struggles, the fight to free the Scottsboro Nine and Angelo Herndon, student strikes against war and fascism, CIO organizing with laundry and steelworkers, and anti-imperialist movement.

[35] See Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

belonged to a CIO union.[36] The CIO hired thirty young activists, fifteen of whom identified as communists, to organize around standard labor issues like wages and hours, and also racial discrimination and sexual harassment. Despite their youth, many of the CIO activists hired to organize laundry workers, such as eighteen year-old college student Beatrice Lumpkin, had been active in the worker justice movement for several years prior to the laundry workers campaign. Because of their commitment to civil disobedience, grassroots organizing, and the empowerment of all workers coupled with a resurging "pro-union climate," by 1941 almost all of the 30,000 laundry workers were covered by union contracts which secured better wages, a forty-five-hour workweek, overtime, and paid holidays. Laundry workers, CIO organizers, Communists, LWS activists, and many others contributed to this victory through years of sustained struggle.[37]

In 1937, one hundred Woolworth saleswomen occupied two of Detroit's five and dime stores, threatening a nation-wide strike.[38] They contrasted their working lives with that of Barbara Hutton, the Woolworth heiress who received the nickname "Poor Little Rich Girl" because of her tragic personal life. Hutton, who flaunted her riches, provided a striking representation of the wealth held in the hands of a few while so many others were jobless and hungry during the Great Depression. After seven days of sustained occupation, the striking women won their demands, including pay raises, shorter hours, and company-provided uniforms.

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[36] The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) worked to unionize laundry workers between 1900 and 1920. Tensions erupted between workers and organizers because of hierarchical power structures that privileged the AFL and WTUL's male and elite female voices and goals over those of female laundry workers. See Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters.*
[37] Jennie Carson, "'Taking on Corporate Bullies,'" p. 460.
[38] "Woolworth Girls Still Hold Fort," *The Bulletin*, 2 March 1937.

That same year, department store workers went on strike in San Francisco and in New York. Hundreds of workers and activists marched on picket lines outside of two of San Francisco's Woolworth stores. The female-led strikers and allies fought hard to reach out to consumers and eventually won continued union recognition and seniority benefits.[39] Nineteen-year-old Marion Brown led the efforts to organize Woolworth's clerks after she was fired for attending a union meeting. Brown, who graduated high school in 1934 and took for granted that she would find a paying job, met with members of the San Francisco Labor Council for advice on forming a union at Woolworth's. Many echoed the dominant attitudes of AFL leaders from the early 1900s. She remembered, "Old timers from Labor Council, some of whom I recall, told me I was wasting my time. 'You can't organize white collar workers, they are too individualistic.' 'Women float in and out of jobs.' 'We tried to organize them many times.' 'An impossible task.'"[40] In 1936, a small group of women began meeting regularly for about six months before receiving applications for union membership. San Francisco Woolworth's clerks went on strike in 1937 and again in 1938 to maintain what they had achieved. The strikers organized pickets with hundreds of female clerks and occasional violence. When police arrested Beatrice Smith for hitting an officer, she appeared contrite before the judge. The local media described Smith as a "102-pound picket" who apologized to

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[39] Strikers circulated propaganda and held public town-hall style meetings that drew crowds as large at 10,000.

[40] *Northern California Labor* 25, no. 11 (March 11, 1977), Ephemera folder, Papers of the Department Store Employees Union, Local 1100, J Paul Leonard Library Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA (hereafter DSEU Papers).

the court, saying, "I'm very sorry and I'll never do it again."[41] Organizers used traditional expectations about femininity and masculinity to present the strikers as well-mannered and petite young women instead of radical militants capable to assault on police officers.

Popular Front activists supported female clerks at department store workers in New York as well. Because an injunction issued by the business-friendly court limited the strength of the picket line, strikers and supporters had to be creative with their tactics. In addition to Communists, Catholics, and the LWS, artists and actors picketed with workers outside of Ohrbach's department store. Wanting to raise the profile of the picket line during the strike, union organizer Clarina Michelson recruited "famous writers, artists, theater people, lawyers, and doctors to picket on Saturdays."[42] When the LWS showed up on the picket line in a Rolls Royce, the members just added to the glamour and pageantry the organizers had intended. Leane Zugsmith, a writer, Popular Front figure, and LWS member, wrote a fictionalized version of the department store strikes in *A Time To Remember*, which reached a wide, mainstream audience.

Historian Daniel Opler argues that the union and its supporters engaged in sabotage to keep the store from operating as business as usual during the Ohrbach's and Kleins strikes. Employees released mice at Klein's, creating an unsanitary and frightening environment for consumers. The union printed balloons with the slogan

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[41] "Apology Frees S.F. Store Striker," (1938), Box 1, Department Store Employees Union Scrapbook, DSEU Papers.
[42] Fisher, *Comrades*, p. 11.

"Don't Buy At Ohrbach's!" and gave them to the children of women shoppers.[43] When management tried to take the balloons away, the children and mothers protested. Ruth Pinkson, an ally to the striking workers, said, "people started to get afraid to go into the store, because they didn't know what [the screaming] was all about."[44] In January 1935, two female strikers chained themselves to chairs at the Waldorf-Astoria during a dinner honoring local philanthropists. In addition to department store owner Nathan Ohrbach, the event was attended by seventeen hundred guests, including New York City Major Fiorello LaGuardia, and was broadcast over the radio. Sympathetic allies gave the women tickets, and they borrowed fine gowns in order to enter surreptitiously. The women, who worked as cashiers at Ohrbach's, told the audience that Nathan Ohrbach could afford to donate thousands of dollars to charity because he paid his workers so poorly.[45] Female department store clerks played a large role in organizing and participating in direct actions, both on and off the picket lines in New York and San Francisco, indicating that empowerment through the worker justice movement was a possibility for women by the 1930s.

Meanwhile, the domestic work industry also experienced a surge in union organizing when, in 1934, Dora Lee Jones helped found the Domestic Worker's Union (DWU) in Harlem. Jones, an African-American domestic worker, formed the DWU along with a group of Finns who "saw the necessity for a fight against

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[43] Daniel Opler, "Monkey Business in Union Square: A Cultural Analysis of the Klein's-Ohrbach's Strikes of 1934-5," *Journal of Social History* 36, No. 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 149-164.
[44] Ruth Pinkson, interviewed by Daniel Opler, Garret Park, Maryland, 10 March 2000.
[45] The women identified themselves as Anne Miller and Anne Friedman. "Girl Striker Heckles La Guardia; Chained to Box, Foils Ejection," *New York Times*, 21 January 1935.

exploitation of [the] Negro domestics."[46] The DWU circulated petitions in support of workplace standards to elected officials, utilized the help of progressive clergy, and invited the Black press to report on the Bronx "slave market." Their first office was destroyed during the 1935 Harlem riots, and the union relocated to Manhattan and soon affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. The union held meetings in their office, which served as a resource center and social space, and invited progressive speakers like the WTUL's Rose Schneiderman. The DWU established cross-class alliances, particularly with the WTUL and YWCA. However, the DWU made specific demands for their involvement, ensuring that the most marginalized voices would be at the forefront.[47]

The worker justice movement of the 1930s provided many young activists with a critique of class exploitation as well as the necessary skills to develop effective campaigns. Woolworth workers learned how to use their identities as young women to their advantage, and Ohrbach's strikers saw the benefit of bringing celebrities to the picket line. Within the worker justice movement was a large cohort of women's organizations that aimed to empower consumers. According to historian Lizabeth Cohen, "they organized committees, conferences, exhibits, fact-finding missions, lobbying efforts, and more, establishing themselves as the new protectors of the consumer interest in a civil society as will as within the expanding sphere of the state."[48] These organizations constituted the second wave of the

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[46] Dora Jones, interview by Vivian Morris, 2 February 1939, American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[47] Vanessa May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 158-9.
[48] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic,* p. 34.

consumers' movement, building off of the Progressive-Era activism covered in Chapter One. In *Buying Power*, Lawrence Glickman argues the League of Women Shoppers was among the "most significant" examples of this second wave of consumer activism.[49]

League of Women Shoppers: A Profile

The LWS stands out from the many leftist groups that made up the labor/consumer coalition of the 1930s and '40s because of their sophisticated understanding of their role as worker allies. The LWS had chapters in heavily populated cities long associated with activism, like San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, and groups also formed in Atlanta, St. Louis, and Hollywood. The LWS handbook offered guidance to women who wanted to form their own chapter, giving a "how to" checklist to recruit members, fundraise, and organize successful campaigns.[50] Although many campaigns were coordinated nationally, each chapter operated autonomously, giving them the freedom to organize campaigns and actions around local issues.[51]

The LWS activists highlighted many of the problems associated with industrial capitalism, and they empowered middle class women to act in solidarity with workers across race, class, and geographic lines. The members took on two different roles as worker allies. First, they used their celebrity to highlight workers' actions. They were able to use the mainstream media and create their own

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[49] Glickman, *Buying Power,* p. 205.
[50] League of Women Shoppers, "League of Women Shoppers Handbook," January 1940. Walter Goldwater Radical Pamphlet Collection, Special Collections Library, Peter J. Shields Library, University of California-Davis, Davis, CA (hereafter Goldwater Collection).
[51] The LWS Constitution states, "Local chapters shall have complete autonomy with respect to their activities subject." See "Agenda for meeting of Constitution Committees – 1/14/39," Folder 1, LWS Papers.

propaganda in order to shine a light on the harshest elements of anti-worker policies. Second, the League identified its members' roles as mothers, consumers, and middle class women in order to suggest ways that individuals could make changes in their own lives that would support workers' rights.

A handful of LWS members enjoyed fame through their work as novelists, labor journalists, playwrights, and fashion designers. For example, Lillian Hellman, LWS national vice-president in 1939, used her platform as a playwright to draw attention to a number of leftist causes from the 1930s through the 1970s.[52] Leane Zugsmith, the proletarian novelist and Popular Front activist, used her skills to research and write about labor disputes for the LWS monthly newsletter, *The Woman Shopper*. Aline Davis Hayes, the first president of the LWS, worked as a "textile and costume designer and department store stylist."[53] Her husband, Arthur Garfield Hayes was a lawyer known for his participation in the Scopes, Sacco and Vanzetti, and Scottsboro cases, in addition to serving as general counsel to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Lucille Finsterwald Ezekiel, president of the Washington branch of the LWS, was married to Mordecai Ezekiel, a New Dealer who later went on to work for the United Nations. These women used their status and human capital in order gain attention for the causes that were important to them.[54] For example, by arriving to the Orbach's picket line in a Rolls Royce, Aline Davis Hayes offered the striking workers much-needed publicity. The participation of

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[52] See Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Difficult Woman: The Challenging Life and Times of Lillian Hellman* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).
[53] "Newly Organized League of Women Shoppers to Investigate Strikes: May Wield Influence," *Luggage & Leather Goods* (July 1935), p. 58.
[54] Davis Hays was among the members of the LWS who arrived at the Orbach's picket line in a Rolls Royce.

celebrities and socialite-activists afforded the LWS a glamorous reputation as they recruited other members.

However, the majority of LSW members were part of the vast, but uncelebrated group that participated in the Depression-era worker justice movement. While Alice Lesser Shepard earned excellent grades in high school, her family never considered sending her to college because it simply was not an option for middle-class women in the 1920s. She helped her husband with the bookkeeping for his store, attended lectures at Columbia, and worked part time for a Broadway agent, but still felt "uneducated, inferior in many ways." When she joined the LWS in 1940, that all changed. She, along with the other members, used her intelligence and organizational skills to act in solidarity with workers, particularly during the ongoing New York department store strikes. Shepard's sister remembers, "[Alice] began to shine, chairing the League – in the nicest possible way, not pushing her weight around, and not giving in to politics." Even after the LWS ceased to exist, Shepard remained empowered to become a life-long activist as she "realized some of her potential," working on issues as diverse as education for returning World War II veterans and increasing women's participation in electoral politics.[55]

While the LWS served as an access point for Alice Lesser Shepard, for other members, it was part of the broader social justice movement. Women in the Atlanta chapter were not conservative southern belles; chapter president Mary Raoul Millis had been active with social and political issues since the 1860s, and was particularly

[55] Susan Shepard Erlich, "A Woman Gentle and Wise: Fond Memories of My Mother, Alice Elsie Lesser Shepard," collected in 2000, Folder 15, LWS Papers.

active in the suffrage movement. Raoul Millis was a leader of the Socialist Party of Georgia for at least three decades, and worked to desegregate the party.[56] Vice President Mary Cornelia Barker, served as president of the Atlanta teachers' union and helped to found Southern Summer School for Women Workers in Industry. She also worked on a campaign to fight against the prosecution of Angelo Herndon, an African-American man who was arrested and convicted of insurrection in 1932 for attempting to organize Black workers in Atlanta.[57]

Jessie Lloyd O'Connor, a labor journalist and president of the Chicago chapter of the LWS, traveled around the country to report labor disputes, particularly textile and mining strikes. When O'Connor traveled to Harlan, Kentucky, to investigate conditions during a 1931 strike, she received a letter threatening her with bodily harm if she did not leave immediately. It was signed by "100 per. cent [sic] Americans."[58] Ultimately, O'Connor did leave Harlan, but continued to criticize union busting, along with the state's unwillingness to protect members of the press.[59] O'Connor was an heir to the *Chicago Tribune* fortune and used her wealth to fund liberal and radical projects for much of her life. Throughout her life, O'Connor worked for progressive causes, and remained involved in the major social justice movements from the 1920s until her death in 1988.[60]

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[56] Letter, Mary Raoul Millis to Frank Manning, National Socialist Party, February 18, 1930. Raoul Family Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University (hereafter referred to as Raoul Papers).
[57] "Protest Against the Indictment of Angelo Herndon," Barker Papers.
[58] "Woman Writer Is Threatened," *Boston Traveler*, 27 August 1931.
[59] Jessie Lloyd O'Connor, "Letter to Gov. Flem D. Sampson, 9 Sept. 1931." Jessie Lloyd O'Connor Papers. Sophia Smith Collection: Agents of Social Change Online Exhibit, http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/ (Accessed on February 12, 2012).
[60] Kathleen Banks Nutter, "Jessie Lloyd O'Connor and Mary Metlay Kaufman: Professional Women Fighting for Social Justice," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 132-5.

Direct Action & Privilege

Landon Storrs coined the term "feminine direct action," to describe the tactics that the LWS used, including fashion shows, boycotts, and pickets.[61] While the LWS often worked with other groups, referring to the Consumers' League as a "sister organization," their strategies for achieving worker justice were different.[62] When asked to explain what made them unique, the LWS said, "Other consumer organizations are not equipped to function where immediate action is required in a labor dispute. They concern themselves primarily with legislative action or with quality standards and prices."[63] Seeing the role of the LWS as different from, and complementary to, their own, the Boston WTUL even sought to organize chapters of the LWS, recruiting members of the Consumers' League.[64]

The LWS investigated strikes and labor disputes in order to determine how they could support workers. After interviewing both labor and management, they published their findings in their monthly newsletter, *The Woman Shopper*. Members could then decide how they would like to take action, by boycotting a certain manufacturer, donating money to strike relief, walking on a picket line, or writing a letter to the management "expressing [their] sentiments regarding the position the

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[61] Landon Storrs, "Left-Feminism, The Consumer Movement, and Red Scare Politics in the United States, 1935-1960," *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 3 (2006), p. 43.
[62] Elinore Morehouse Herrick, "A Sister Organization," *The Woman Shopper*, November 1935, Folder 424, Box 25, CL of M Records.
[63] League of Women Shoppers, "League of Women Shoppers Handbook," January 1940, Goldwater Collection.
[64] Alice Dodge, "Letter to Margaret Wiesman, November 23, 1935," Folder 424, Box 25, CL of M Records.

company has taken."[65] When asked to explain what the League of Women Shoppers would do to aid workers, New York branch president Aline Davis Hayes said:

> When a crisis occurs between employer and employee our staff will make a thorough investigation and report to the board. If directors vote to support labor, the whole story will be sent to members. Facts which newspapers cannot give because they must protect advertisers will be given so that women will know all sides of a labor dispute. With this evidence, should it prove favorable to employees, women will be asked to protest to employers by means of letters, visiting delegations, picketing and other demonstrations. Furthermore, the members will be expected to withhold patronage from the store involved or specific factory product until the unjust conditions have been remedied.[66]

The underlying purpose aimed to democratize the process of consuming. The LWS believed that industry had a direct interest in silencing labor disputes and the media benefitted from downplaying information about worker exploitation. The LWS gave its members all of the available facts so they could decide for themselves how to use their purchasing power most effectively.

Labor unions quickly recognized that the LWS was a powerful ally. After the speedy settlement of a strike at a 1935 New York shoe store, the group received a letter from a union representative, who claimed, "the marvelous support of the League has been instrumental in securing working conditions for all Ansonio salesmen, far more favorable that prior to the strike." Their support on the picket line and outreach to consumers pressured management to settle with workers, who won "100% union conditions."[67] The LWS joined other leftist activists in supporting a strike at the *American Mercury*, a prominent literary magazine. After speaking to

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[65] Atlanta League of Women Shoppers, "Special Bulletin, July 1939," Barker Papers.
[66] "Newly Organized League of Women Shoppers to Investigate Strikes," *Luggage & Leather Goods.*
[67] The LWS sent postcards to the store's patrons asking them to sign and deliver an attached card that read, "I have been a customer of Ansonia. I do not feel inclined to favor your store while your employees are denied a union and a living wage." "League Forces Shoe Settlement Strike," *The Woman Shopper* - August 1935," Folder 424, Box 25, CL of M Records.

both sides, an investigating committee made up of six members of the LWS voted to side with the workers. Members of the LWS were among the fifty-two arrested for "disorderly conduct" on the picket line in July of 1935. Attorney Arthur Garfield Hayes, husband of Aline Davis Hayes, successfully represented all of those arrested. Not only did the magistrate dismiss the charges, she called for a "definite police policy toward demonstrations."[68] The LWS activists' tactics, both on and off the picket lines, emphasized workers' conditions and the unfair advantages given to employers through business-friendly laws.

While only a handful of the members of the LWS were wealthy, the bulk of the membership came from the "comfortable class" and worked as professional writers, teachers, and artists or as stay-at-home mothers. It was their elite status that gave them the power to highlight injustices done to workers, as the mainstream media devoted a great deal of resources covering their participation on picket lines. In 1937, the *Baltimore Sun* described members from the local chapter as "fur-coated" when they joined the strikers who were picketing the National Pants Company.[69] While the media somewhat disparagingly referred to them as the "Mink Brigade," the League used this to their advantage.[70] Wealthier members loaned the less-elite member silk gowns, jewels, and mink coats in order to guarantee attention from consumers and journalists.[71] Indeed, the LWS had proven to be such

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[68] 52 Pickets Freed In Mercury Case," *New York Times* 19 Jul 1935; Lewis Cohen, "A Socialist Training School," *The Student Outlook* – October 1935, http://newdeal.feri.org/students/out01.htm (accessed June 14, 2012).
[69] "Women Shoppers Join Strikers In Picketing Washington Plant," *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 March 1937.
[70] Lawrence Glickman, "The Strike in the Temple of Consumption: Consumer Activism and Twentieth-Century Political Culture," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001), pp. 99-128.
[71] Erlich, A Woman Gentle and Wise," LWS Papers.

important allies that the New Jersey chapter was banned from "picketing or distributing handbills" outside of a local shoe store in 1939.[72]

Not only did the LWS provide a shield against violence on the picket line the group helped bring attention to labor issues. If police arrested any LWS members the media were likely to report on the labor dispute. In November of 1935, twenty-four members were arrested while picketing May's Department Store in Brooklyn, and the local and national media covered the story in great detail. In St. Louis, meanwhile, when three women planning to organize an LWS chapter joined 225 striking female workers employed by the National Underwear Corporation, the local newspaper reported the dispute. In 1936, members from the New York chapter refused to abandon a Brooklyn department store picket line when told by the police that only two people were allowed. Eight members were arrested and found guilty of disorderly conduct. They used the publicity around their arrests to critique the "unlimited discretion of the police." Then, during a 1937 picket, police arrested eight members of the LWS for picketing a New York beauty shop. The activists wore towels on their heads as a way to attract attention to the poor working conditions in the beauty shops that middle-class women frequented. The magistrate criticized the women, all between the ages of twenty-four and thirty, for displaying un-feminine behavior in such a public space, telling them "you should be home knitting." [73]

While members of the League were accused of subverting their roles as women, they also used their gender identities to connect with female shoppers. In

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[72] "Bars Pickets of Women Shoppers," *New York Times*, 28 March 1939.
[73] "Wives of Three Educators March in Picket Lines," *Joplin Globe,* 10 February 1937; Picket Decision Assailed: Women Shoppers See Ruling as Giving Police Undue Power," *New York Times*, 19 November 1936; "Court Scolds Pickets," *New York Times*, 12 February 1937.

1937, the LWS sent Leane Zugsmith to Gadsden, Alabama, to investigate the union-busting done at the behest of the city's major employers.[74] After two years of violence, intimidation, and layoffs, union leaders invited leftist groups to Gadsden so they might investigate the labor conditions and publicize them. Zugsmith's report appeared in the summer issue of *The Woman Shopper* and included a strong indictment of the violence done on behalf business interests, including details of beatings with brass knuckles and billy clubs. Zugsmith argued that this was an issue that female consumers should be aware of "because more and more women buy automobiles and automobile tires."[75] The League planned to distribute a formal report later in the month advising its membership how to respond to the harsh, anti-worker conditions in Gadsden. In the meantime, Zugsmith chose to use very specific language to describe union-busting. By using the term "labor terrorism," the LWS framed Gadsden capitalists as antithetical to democracy.

In other cases, the LWS attempted to highlight how pro-worker policies were good for business. For example, the LWS organized a boycott of Borden & Co., a major seller of processed milk, and its 2,000 members refused to buy the brand during an ongoing labor dispute. As a form of escalation, fifteen members who

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[74] The "Big Three" was comprised of Goodyear Tires, which employed 1,500 workers; Dwight Manufacturing Company, which employed 2,000 mill operatives; and Gulf-State Steel Company, which had 3,000 employees. Once section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act was enacted in 1933, guaranteeing workers the right to organize, many workers were enthusiastic about joining a union. However, as the major employers in Gadsden, the "Big Three" wielded considerable power. These companies received support from conservative city boosters, including local officials willing to abuse their power. As a reward for this support, Goodyear agreed to shift some of its production in Akron, Ohio down to Gadsden, which benefited elected officials during their reelection campaigns. Their union-busting tactics were so extreme that both local and national media reported on the violence in Gadsden. For example, see Maxwell Stewart, "Gadsden Is Tough," *The Nation* 145 (July 1937) p. 69-70; Charles H. Martin, "Southern Labor Relations in Transition: Gadsden, Alabama, 1930-1943, *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 4 (November 1981), pp. 545-568.

[75] League of Women Shoppers, "Workers Terrorized: League Representative Reports on Gadsden, Ala., Charges," *The Woman Shopper* (1937) Folder 11, LWS Records.

owned stock in Borden traveled to New Jersey for the annual stockholders' meeting in the spring of 1936. Evelyn Preston, then president of the LWS, disrupted the meeting, asking if it "might it not be cheaper for the stockholder in the long run if the company quickly negotiated with the union?" When management suggested that employees were happy and that union demands were unreasonable, Leane Zugsmith responded that "the company is losing money because Borden products are not bought in union circles and thousands of bottles have been dropped a day."[76]

Because of its commitment to local autonomy, LWS chapters were poised to support issues specific to workers in their own communities. The San Francisco chapter highlighted the conditions faced by migrant farm workers through its collaboration with the Bay Area Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers (BACAAW). [77] On behalf of the LWS, chapter president Rikee Elsesser served on the board of the BACAAW, which emphasized the struggles faced by those who labored in the "factories in the field."[78] Elsesser, who hitchhiked from New York to California as a young woman before becoming a hospital administrator, was active with a number of Popular Front organizations.[79] New Deal relief programs offered little aid to farm workers, so the BACAAW listened to and publicized testimony that shed light on the

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[76] "Business: League v. Borden," *Time,* April 1936.
[77] Herrick Lane, "Letter from Herrick Lane to recruit members," August 2, 1940, folder 2, box 64, Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast Records, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA (hereafter MFPC Records).
[78] Activist journalist Carey McWilliams coined this term in 1939 with his book by the same name. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was published in the same year; activist groups on the West Coast were galvanized by the literature. See Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1939).
[79] Congress, House, Subcommittee of the Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Held in San Francisco, Calif., June 18-21, 1957,* 85th Cong., 1st sess., June 20, 19 57, p. 1214; Grace S. Kang, Christopher Arnold, and Robert Reitherman, *Connections: EERI Oral History Series: Eric Elsesser* (Oakland: Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, 2010).

"main problems of agricultural labor in California: housing, relief and health."[80] In October 1939, cotton pickers went on strike in Madera, California and were subject to mass arrests, tear gas, and vigilante violence while law enforcement watched.[81] The BACAAW quickly organized a tour to publicize the strikers' plight, and the LWS participated in a fifty person caravan of "average citizens of moderate means" touring the San Joaquin Valley to view living and working conditions and to meet with the jailed strikers in Madero. One of the camp owners tried to intimidate the caravaners and destroy the camera of the photographer from *Life* magazine, but they still managed to speak with the workers. In the press release that the group released after the tour, Elsesser criticized the private camps for price gauging and exploitation. Another caravaner identified as a "San Francisco housewife" described how the state and privately-owned camps open to African-American migrants were full of "dirt and squalor," in comparison to the camps run by the federal government.[82]

The Personal Is Political

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[80] Bay Area Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers, "Report on the Bakersfield Conference on Agricultural Labor," October 29, 1938, folder 1, box 64, MFPC Records.

[81] The Associated Farmers, an organization formed in 1934 to prevent agricultural workers from joining unions, received funding from corporations with interests in keeping wages down. Corporations including California Packing Corporation, DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation, and Pacific Gas & Electric Co., contributed $13,700, $10,000, and $4,375.00 to the Associated Farmers, respectively. The major railroads contributed over $17,000. On October 21, 1939, the Farmers Association organized a mob of two hundred carloads of growers carrying rubber hoses, fan belts, and auto cranks and attacked strikers and their families while the sheriff looked on. While officials did not arrest farmers, dozens of agricultural workers were jailed. "Big Business Gave Birth to A.F.," *The Rural Observer* 3, no. 1, (January 1940), folder 5, box 1, Helen Hosmer Papers, 1937-1969, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA. See also Stuart Marshall Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture* (Manchester, Ayer Publishing, 1946); Clarke A. Chambers, *California Farm Organizations: A Historical Study of the Grange, the Farm Bureau and the Associated Farmers, 1929-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952).

[82] Bay Area Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers, "Report to State Relief Administration Re: Migratory Workers," November 1, 1939, folder 7, box 46, MFPC Records.

In addition to supporting workers by highlighting labor disputes publicly, the LWS also found ways for consumers to make changes in their own lives. For example, a number of locals worked on the implementation of the union label, which designated which goods were made under fair conditions, including "no unsanitary conditions, no child labor, and no home work."[83] Following in the footsteps of the National Consumers' League's "white label" campaign of the early 1900s, the LWS believed this label was the most effective and efficient way to help shoppers make purchasing decisions.[84] This demonstrated their emphasis on workers' freedom of association, in addition to their concern about sweatshop conditions. The LWS saw the union label as:

> The indication that the product has been manufactured or sold or that the service is by unionized workers. To the consumer, it is a guarantee that the article was not produced in sweatshops, under unhygienic conditions, or by child labor. The label serves as one kind of boycott against commodities produced or sold in open or anti-labor shops.[85]

Members of the LWS showed their support for the union label by leaving calling cards in stores that did not carry union-made products. One such card read, "I came in to buy union made crackers. [I] did not see the Bakers' and Confectioners' Union label. That is why I walked out. I will call again."[86] By leaving a card, management saw that shoppers supported workers' right to belong to a union, and that there was a high price attached to the decision to carry goods without a union label.[87]

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[83] Atlanta League of Women Shoppers, *The Woman Shopper*, September 1939, Barker Papers.
[84] A union label was, and continues to be, an important tool to ensure that garments were not made in sweatshops.
[85] Leane Zugsmith, "L Is for Labor: A Glossary of Labor Terms," Barker Papers.
[86] Cracker Calling Card, (1939), Folder 10, LWS Records.
[87] For more on food-related consumer activism, see Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles chapter encouraged its membership to patronize union shops and by union-made goods even if non-union companies provided the same wages and conditions. The LWS believed that unions were the best way to protect against sweatshops, and that without a union management could easily take away the good conditions.[88] The LWS worked with the CL and WTUL on a survey to investigate the goods sold in New York department stores. They found that, while some of the high-end goods bore the union label, "practically none" [of] the lower-end merchandise" contained the worker-friendly designation. With the belief that the union label was a guarantee for good labor conditions in sanitary environments, the CL, WTUL, and the LWS launched a renewed joint campaign for the label.[89]

The League of Women Shoppers was particularly skilled at producing propaganda that would reach the reader both emotionally and pragmatically. They used the term "sweatshop" liberally in order to appeal to consumers' sense of obligation to labor standards. The LWS warned shoppers that, "Unless you KNOW where and how to buy, your dollar helps keep children overworked and undernourished."[90] The Chicago chapter used this hook for recruitment, inviting their membership to a panel about the conditions in garment factories. The invitation reads, "Are cheap dresses necessarily made by sweated labor? That question, which has bothered all of us who are bargain-hunters by choice or necessity, will be answered at our next meeting."[91] The panel included two union

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[88] The League of Women Shoppers, "The Question Box," The Woman Shopper (January-February 1938) Folder 11, LWS Records.
[89] "Buyers Label Slighted: Three Women's Leagues Renew Drive for Consumer Cooperation, *New York Times,* 23 January 1938.
[90] League of Women Shoppers, "League of Women Shoppers Pamphlet," 1937. O'Connor Papers.
[91] Chicago League of Women Shoppers, "Dear Woman Shopper," Folder 1, LWS Records.

organizers, an employer, and a member of the LWS's investigating committee in order to present multiple perspectives on the issue. Because many shoppers were also mothers, the language of child labor and sweatshops appealed to their morals. However, rather than limiting the issue to the emotional level to try to guilt shoppers, the LWS helped to educate women to make good consumer decisions that also benefitted the workers producing and selling their goods.

In addition to making the argument for justice, the League of Women Shoppers also connected ethical consumption to their members' prosperity. They argued that if middle class women actively fought for better working conditions for mill and factory workers, then these same workers would have more purchasing power. According to one LWS pamphlet, "A doctor cannot prosper if his clients can't afford to call him in when he is needed. A storeowner faces ruin when many of his customers are unable to buy the goods they need."[92] Effectively, they argued that better conditions for workers were a win for everyone. In fact, the Atlanta chapter explained that the mission of the League was "to utilize the buying power of the community for the purpose of raising the general standards of merchandising methods for the benefit of the whole community."[93] They did not see themselves middle class saviors of workers; rather, the women in the LWS acted in concert with workers in order to bridge the gap between democracy and capitalism.

In addition to appealing to their members' moral duty, they also sought to empower them as political agents. The LWS published many pamphlets and flyers that said, "90% of the buying is done by women." They believed that their message

[92] League of Women Shoppers, "League of Women Shoppers Pamphlet," 1937, O'Conner Papers.
[93] "Objectives," Atlanta League of Women Shoppers. Raoul Papers.

of ethical consumerism was applicable for a "mother, housewife, professional women, business woman, [or] actress." They offered women the chance to engage in collective activity to improve workers' lives, writing that while business easily could ignore the protest of one woman "[they] MUST recognize the power of many women banded together to protect their own interests and to ensure workers a decent standard of living." [94]

The Atlanta chapter, meanwhile, chose to focus on the issue of milk safety, which was particularly significant for women and children. They organized a lecture that featured a professor from Emory University, who spoke about "diseases contracted from milk."[95] They also formed a Milk Committee to investigate and report on which method of pasteurization was used by the different plants in the city and the conditions of the workers. The committee did not suggest that their membership take any particular action at that time; rather, they simply were giving them the facts so that they might decide on the safest and healthiest choice for their families.[96]

The New York chapter also worked with a large coalition to set up a Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative. The cooperative was organized by the Milk Consumers Protective Committee and had the active support of forty organizations, including the LWS. In their newsletter, the League argued members should join the co-op so that "the money you spend for milk need no longer go principally toward

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[94] Los Angeles League of Women Shoppers, "90% of the Buying Is Done by Women," Folder 11, LWS Papers.
[95] Atlanta League of Women Shoppers, "Diseased Contracted from Milk," Barker Papers.
[96] Atlanta League of Women Shoppers, *The Woman Shopper*, September 1939, Barker Papers.

making profits for huge structures."[97] All of those who labored to get milk from a cow to the store would be paid union wages, and any leftover profits would be split between the consumers and the farmers. The cooperative was incredibly successful from the start and existed until the 1970s, outlasting the LWS by about thirty years.[98]

These attempts to "civilize capitalism" gave mothers and other consumers easy entry into the worker justice movement. Women did not need to participate in civil disobedience in order be effective allies. Recognizing that women did between eight-five and ninety percent of household purchasing, the group appealed to its members as ethical consumers, noting that even a low-income housewife could make a difference.[99] The group emphasized that while management could be patronizing toward one woman, they could not so easily dismiss an entire league of women shoppers.

The LWS encouraged its membership to implement decent standards voluntarily when employing domestic and laundry workers, who were excluded from the New Deal. LWS propaganda criticized the blatant and covert racism, sexism, and classism that intersected in those industries. In addition to the many newsletters, flyers, and pamphlets, they also published several small books, including *Consider the Laundry Workers*, which contained personal stories from laundry workers, who were mostly African American women and Latinas. These

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[97] The League of Women Shoppers, *The Woman Shopper*, May 1938, Barker Papers.
[98] Minutes of Second Annual Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative Board of Directors Meeting, October 30, 1939, Consumer's Union Archives, http://www.nyfoodmuseum.org/milk/bibliography.php (accessed on May 19, 2012).
[99] Los Angeles League of Women Shoppers, "90% of the Buying Is Done by Women," Folder 11, League of Women Shoppers Records; Chicago League of Women Shoppers, "Women Do 85% of the Buying," (1942), Folder 10, LWS Papers.

tracts also included accounts of the LWS's investigations and research on wages, cost of living, and conditions.

Among the specific issues confronted was employers' use of racial antagonism to exploit racial and gender tensions to their benefit. For example, one African American laundry worker said:

> In our laundry they had only white girls first. Then later they started taking on colored girls but this is the way they did it: a colored girl would come in and the boss said, "We can't take you on. The white girls don't want to work with you." The colored girl would start to go and he'd say, "I'll take you, but you got to work for less money than the white girls." They incited one against the other and later they cut the white girls, saying they could get colored girls cheaper.[100]

While calling for minimum wages and the ability for workers to safely organize unions, the book also included a number of ways that consumers, specifically women, could help ease some of the poor working conditions. For example, Mondays were known as "wash days," which created a very uneven workweek, with excessively long workdays on Sundays and Mondays and very little work to do on other days of the week. The LWS encouraged members to flexible with their "wash day," preventing a weekly speed up and stretch.

The Washington, D.C. and New York chapter also produced ethical guidelines for hiring domestic workers. In 1937, at the behest of the Domestic Workers Union (DWU), the New York chapter formed a committee to investigate the rumors of a "slave market" in the Bronx where white women "bargain[ed] for domestic workers as they do for their vegetables." The committee went undercover, portraying themselves as potential employers. Their whiteness served as a passport to women

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[100] Filley and Mitchell, *Consider the Laundry Workers*, p. 48, Fromkin Collection.

"shopping for domestics," who were willing to talk openly about their desire for cheap help. Indeed the investigation committee commonly heard talk of "the good days when a bargain could be struck at 25 cents an hour."[101] At the time, the DWU was calling for forty cents an hour.[102] The LWS published articles that displayed to middle class women how their insistence on paying poverty wages impacted other women. They followed the articles with suggested opportunities for middle class white women to show their solidarity with working class black women through voluntarily implementing better working conditions.

In 1941, the Washington, D.C. branch published a study done at the behest of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, showing, among other things, that half of the county's domestic workers were African American. In addition to recommending strong domestic workers unions, as a more immediate suggestion, it encouraged a set of workplace standards that their membership could implement, including maximum hours and minimum wages.[103]

In 1940, the Atlanta chapter of the League of Women Shoppers "voted to dissolve the organization, because of the apparent impossibility of obtaining the cooperation necessary to keep it functioning correctly."[104] In June of 1949, the national LWS disbanded altogether. The acting chair, Katharine Armitage, said that "membership had been falling away as women's interests shifted to a greater

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[101] Esther Grey, "Domestic Workers – Cheap," *The Woman Shopper* (1937), LWS Records.
[102] While the federal minimum wage would be forty cents an hour just three years later, it did not apply to domestic workers, illustrating the need for workers to organize a union.
[103] Washington League of Women Shoppers, "Household Occupation in the District of Columbia: Why Is the Household Employee So Easily Out-Weighed in the Scale of Security?" (1941), Folder 12, LWS Records.
[104] Atlanta League of Women Shoppers, "Letter to announce dissolution of group," (1940), Barker Papers.

emphasis on world affairs." At that point, there were only 1,000 members, while at its peak there had been close to 20,000. The Minneapolis chapter was the only local that had voted to remain active as the LWS. Locals in Miami, Denver, Newark, New York, and Columbus voted to disband, but were encouraged to join other organizations working on justice issues.[105]

Conclusion

The LWS showed that all actions mattered. They encouraged consumers to be conscious and active in their choices and to demand that workers be respected and treated fairly. They highlighted some of the worst exploitation of the period, and they gave middle class women the tools necessary to be useful allies. They helped confront union busting from factories in Gadsden, Alabama, to department stores in New York City. They also fought exploitation in their own pantries, by choosing goods with a union label and paying domestic workers a living wage. This solidarity between consumers and workers was not necessarily a threat to industrial capitalism. It did, however, disrupt "business as usual."

As an important group within the worker justice movement, the League of Women Shoppers offered female consumers a way to show their solidarity with workers. In 1939, famed playwright and LWS national vice-president Lillian Hellman spoke to the Pittsburgh chapter about women's responsibility for "social and economic problems." She said that a housewife or professional woman who could "remain indifferent to public problems not related to her own little domain

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[105] "Women Shoppers Disband," *The Miami News*, 30 July 1949.

belongs to the limbo a bygone age."[106] The LWS believed that middle class women had an obligation to use their privilege to support workers. They believed in standards that improved working and living conditions, trying to enforce those standards when they were laws, and working to create them for those outside of the New Deal. The League of Women Shoppers provided educational materials and moralistic propaganda to make a case for solidarity. Then it provided its members with concrete suggestions so they could "use [their] buying power for justice." The LWS's solidarity was both its mission and its undoing. The Second Red Scare gave their powerful enemies in the business and political arenas the opportunity to hold the group and its members accountable for decreased profits during labor disputes. In my next chapter, I will examine the repression of progressive activists and the creation of a radical Right-wing cultural movement.

[106] Anne Weiss, "Economic Duty Has No Limit: Playwright Tells about League Activity," *The Pittsburgh Press*, 9 February 1939.

CHAPTER FOUR

Red-Baiting the Popular Front: The Far Right Backlash to Solidarity Activism

On October 26, 1947, Walt Disney testified to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, naming the League of Women Voters as part of "a Commie front organization" aimed at destroying him. After the League of Women Voters protested his accusation, he quickly clarified his statement in a telegram, apologizing for his mistake and accusing the League of Women Shoppers (LWS) of participating in a worldwide communist conspiracy whose aim was to smear him. The LWS, particularly the Hollywood chapter, supported striking Disney animators during their 1941 strike. Disney, who has since been exposed as a secret informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), believed "Communistic agitation caused the strike because everyone who worked in his studio was "100 percent American." As a respected member of the business elite, his testimony was taken at face value. His testimony, careless as it was, was one of many sought by the FBI and conservative politicians to end the worker justice movement of the 1930s.[1]

Beginning the late 1930s, the extreme Right began, in the name of national security, to systematically suppress Americans involved in the worker justice movement and New Deal agencies. A new version of the long-established coalition of businessmen and politicians sought to weaken the momentum of labor reform and the activists at forefront of the movement. Wealthy businessmen like Walt Disney, media magnates such as William Randolph Hearst, professional anti-communists offering expert research and testimony, and conservative Democrats

[1] Herbert Mitgang, "Disney Link To the F.B.I. And Hoover Is Disclosed," *New York Times,* 6 May 1993.

and Republicans in state and national offices worked together to undermine groups like the League of Women Shoppers as well as policies introduced through the New Deal. In this chapter, I will show how corporate interests and political conservatism coalesced to repress the solidarity activism that had begun to threaten their profits and power. The extreme Right manipulated the mainstream media while creating their own to shape both public policy and American culture. The anti-sweatshop, pro-worker movement that became entrenched among mainstream consumers crumbled under the weight of consistent scrutiny linking their actions with Communism, beginning in the late 1930s.

The Second Red Scare

The Great Depression marked a shift in the perception of businessmen who had been celebrated and supported during the 1920s. As many industrialists like Bethlehem Steele's Charles Schwab offered advice such as keeping calm and refraining from worry, the public began to view them as ridiculous and incapable. While the New Deal drew immediate critique from some elites, others initially supported Roosevelt's goal of saving private property and raising wages to encourage consumption. Some moderate businessmen recognized that low wages, minimal regulation, union busting, and brutal conditions caused New Dealers and American workers to reject the *laissez-faire* beliefs that had allowed leading businessmen to accumulate massive wealth in the 1920s. However, many others worked to undermine the progressive policies. Chemical company DuPont's Pierre du Pont, who had briefly served as an advisor for Roosevelt's National Recovery Agency and the National Labor Board, argued against a federal law prohibiting child

labor, claiming that parents should make that decision, not the government.[2] In 1935, members of the du Pont family donated almost $45,000 to the American Liberty League, a bi-partisan group of conservative Democrats and Republicans formed to "to combat radicalism, preserve property rights, uphold and preserve the Constitution" by opposing Roosevelt's reelection in 1936.[3] Media magnates William Randolph Hearst and Robert McCormick vocally opposed the New Deal, and Hearst publicly condemned Roosevelt's plan to increase taxes on the wealthy and corporations, even referring to him as "Stalin Delano Roosevelt."[4]

Conservative intellectual and cultural leaders wrote about the alleged connection between the New Deal and Communism, attempting to influence the 1936 presidential election. For example, two weeks prior to Roosevelt's reelection, anti-communist activist and writer Elizabeth Dilling published *The Roosevelt Red Record and Its Background.* Dilling claimed that her book was a "comprehensive study of the radical movement, in which President Roosevelt now plays a leading role."[5] She connected over 1,000 notable Americans to the White House as part of a far-reaching campaign to further the attacks on capitalism. While mainstream Republicans refrained from utilizing her book during the campaign and many

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[2] Schwab, unrelated the investment banker Charles R. Schwab, prevented Bethlehem Steel from unionizing until 1941. George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

[3] By 1925, the du Pont family was worth $566 million, making them the fourth richest family in the United States, after the Rockefellers, Fords, and Mellons. They accumulated the majority of their wealth during World War I and the 1920s. Robert Frederick Burk, *The Corporate State and the Broker State: The Du Ponts and American National Politics, 1925-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[4] Ben E. Procter, *William Randolph Hearst: Final Edition, 1911-1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brian R. Farmer, *American Conservatism: History, Theory and Practice* (New York: New Castle, UK: Scholars Press, 2005).

[5] Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Dilling, *The Roosevelt Red Record and Its Background* (Chicago: Geographical Publishing Company of Chicago, 1936).

readers pointed to the falsifications and prejudices within her writing, extremists like William Dudley Pelley praised her as an "outstanding heroine" for her compilation of self-proclaimed irrefutable facts.[6] After touring the Soviet Union in 1931, Dilling came to believe that Jews were responsible for the communist movement and published *The Red Network—A Who's Who of Radicalism for Patriots* to expose that relationship and identify communist fronts.[7] The changes and anxieties of the era made the time between World Wars I and II the "worst period of American antisemitism" and right wing pundits linked the Great Depression, New Deal, and war to Jews.[8] Antisemitic public figures referred to the New Deal as the "Jew Deal" and they insisted that Jews dominated Roosevelt's administration. [9] Dilling and others believed that Roosevelt and many Leftist groups operated as "Trojan Horses" that allowed the infiltration of radical Communism into mainstream America. In *The Red Network*, Dilling identified the Women's Trade Union League as an "ultra radical A.F. of L. affiliate" who worked with socialists, communists, union leaders, and elites like Eleanor Roosevelt. The League of Women Shoppers were singled out for allegedly harboring radical anti-capitalists in their midst.

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[6] William Dudley Pelley was inspired by Adolf Hitler to found the Silver Legion, a fascist, anti-Communist anti-Semitic, anti-New Deal, anti-Catholic, racist organization. See Scott Beekman, *William Dudley Pelley: A Life in Right-Wing Extremism And the Occult* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005); Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[7] *The Red Network*, which Dilling self published and claimed to have distributed over 100,000 copies, was praised in 2010, by far Right talk radio host Glenn Beck as a patriotic service. Her anti-Semitism lead her to oppose World War II, as she co-founded the far Right Mother's Movement and joined the America First Committee, two anti-war organizations, and she was indicted under the Smith Act of 1940 for sedition and other acts of conspiracy.

[8] Leonard Dinnerstein, "Antisemitism in Crisis Times in the United States: The 1920s and 1930s," *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis,* ed. Sander L. Gilman and Steven Katz, (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 212.

[9] *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis,* ed. Sander L. Gilman and Steven Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 11.

While the term "McCarthyism" has seen frequent use within popular culture to describe the extreme anti-Communism of the 1950s, the ideological expressions of the terms had their genesis in the movement against liberal and radical ideology, individuals, and organizations in the late 1930s and forties. Chapter Two examined the so-called "First Red Scare," or the conservative reaction to the Progressive Era in the 1920s. The "First Red Scare" advanced the extreme repression of activists, workers, and immigrants during the late 1910s and '20s as policy makers and law enforcement worked in conjunction with of business elites to ensure high profits and little regulation. This chapter considers the "Second Red Scare," or the suppression of both liberal and radical activists in the late 1930s and 1940s.

While there have been several specific moments of liberal progress throughout the twentieth century, the *de facto*, and often *de jure,* norm has been extreme anti-Communism, often accompanied with policies that supported nationalism, individual private property rights, deportations and opposed regulation, reform, free speech and press, and the right to assemble. There had been strong periods of repression in the United States beginning when Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 which threatened the deportation of immigrants considered "dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States" and the denial of free speech rights. These acts set the state for occasional periods of exaggerated reactions to activists and workers at moments when the economic and political power brokers were losing influence.

In response to the New Deal, one of the brief moments of liberalism, the far Right coalesced to manufacture the "Second Red Scare." It served to recover some

of the gains made by activists, workers, and New Dealers attempting to make capitalism more in step with democracy and decrease the extreme income inequality of the 1920s. The solidarity across class, occupation, and race that many AFL and CIO unions, justice groups, and radical individuals exhibited and clamored for in the early to mid-1930s elicited alarm from the economic and political elites who had achieved extreme wealth and power in the '20s when politics and capital aligned. Following many of the same patterns from the earlier Red Scare of the late 1910s, the far Right used their resources to repress and persecute dissenting voices. They updated their playbook as well, using well-publicized loyalty hearings for those who could not easily be deported. Importantly, they had control over new and developing media as well.

Throughout the Second Red Scare, the Right employed gendered rhetoric in loyalty investigations that linked traditional masculine qualities with anti-Communism, and feminine qualities with subversion. This Red Scare discourse implied that male New Dealers were weak, soft, and impotent. Loyal Americans in contrast were virile, masculine, patriotic, and willing to stand up to both internal and external threats of Communism. Men with activist wives were portrayed as unable to control "their women" and were overwhelmed by the subversive politics their women endorsed. Gendered expectations of loyalty placed public left-leaning women in the difficult position of demonstrating their toughness without upsetting cultural norms. Red-baited women presented a double threat. They demonstrated

these transgressions through their rejection of the domestic sphere and their alleged disloyalty to their country and powerful male elites.[10]

Dies Committee

Additionally, anti-communists believed that women were more susceptible to manipulation from radicals than men, and as such, women's organizations were more likely to be infiltrated by subversives. The Right devoted a great deal of time and resources investigating and smearing both individual women and their organizations. Many activist groups with female majority memberships were accused of knowingly or unwittingly acting as fronts. In 1930, Congress established a committee to investigate those suspected of domestic fascism and Communism. In 1938, that committee was reorganized into the House Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by Martin Dies, a conservative Texas Democrat. The Dies Committee, as it was known until it became a standing committee in 1945, investigated disloyalty among private citizens, public employees, and organizations. The Special House Committee on Un-American Activities was given the following tasks:

> Investigate (1) the extent, character, and objects of un-American propaganda activities in the United States, (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution, and (3) all other questions in

[10] Kyle A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (2000): 515-45; Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Michael J. Heale, *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998),

> relation thereto that would aid Congress in any necessary remedial legislation.[11]

The broad, if not vague nature of the committee's charge allowed Chairman Dies, and later Senator Joseph McCarthy, to allow his political opinions to set the agenda. The committee enjoyed popularity during its early years, as shown by high ratings in Gallop polls and Congress' decision to increase its funding. Extreme right-wing activists and businessmen offered their support, giving testimony and wide-spread positive media coverage, particularly within the Hearst and McCormick newspapers. An ardent opponent of the New Deal, Dies targeted Roosevelt's administration in order to taint the President's advisors, supporters, and policies with communist associations.

The Dies Committee centered many of its accusations on "guilt by association," rendering suspects guilty based on the organizations to which they belong and the company they kept. Because of the broad coalition of the Popular Front, made up of both liberals and communists, many non-communists were deemed guilty, or communist, through their association. According to historian Robert Griffin, Dies considered "liberals, socialists, and fellow travelers…only slightly less sinister than communists."[12] In his 1964 essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," Richard Hofstadter argued that "heated exaggeration,

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[11] United States. Congress. House. Special Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of un-American propaganda activities in the United States. Hearings before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-fifth Congress, third session-Seventy-eighth Congress, second session, on H. Res. 282 to investigate (l) the extent, character, and objects of un-American propaganda activities in the United States, (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution, and (3) all other questions in relation thereto that would aid Congress in any necessary remedial legislation. (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1938-1944), San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, CA.

[12] Robert Griffin, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 32.

suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" had been the driving force of politics during the early Red Scare. Hofstadter suggests that Dies's, and later McCarthy's, paranoid style demonstrates how "much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority."[13] Members of the committee used their power to undermine the Roosevelt administration and others who held views they considered collectivistic. They used the so-called expert testimony of former-communists who made careers as investigators by providing false or exaggerated evidence against high-profile public figures and organizations. While some of those who testified had legitimate radical credentials, others manufactured their resumes in order to justify their inclusion as paid researchers, speakers, and writers. While they offered little proof of threats to national security, many lives and careers were ruined by their testimonies.

In addition to activist groups, the Dies Committee sought to undermine the New Deal programs that offered a safety net to many Americans, particularly the cultural projects. The Federal Writers' Project (FWP) and the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), New Deal programs that were part of the Works Progress Administration, used federal funding to support out-of-work writers, artists, actors, and directors during the Great Depression. They created entertainment for working-class families and contributed to the growing movement of proletarian culture. In a 1938 testimony, committee member Representative J. Parnell Thomas

[13] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine* (November 1964), pp. 77–86.

claimed that he had "startling evidence" that the FWP and the FTP were "a hotbed of Communists" and announced that an investigation was underway.[14]

Relying on half-truths and exaggeration, anti-communists offered testimony that overstated or often fabricated the presence of communists within organizations. When Rena Vale, a novelist, screenwriter, reformed radical, former member of the CPUSA and LWS, and employee of the FTP testified before the Dies Committee, she offered testimony that condemned almost every part of the worker justice movement. Vale fostered a long and prominent career as a professional anti-communist, working both for the Dies Committee and the California Senate Fact-Finding Sub-Committee on Un-American Activities (CUAC). In June 1940, Vale told the committee that she joined the CPUSA and helped organize the Los Angeles chapter of the LWS, which she said "was fostered by the [Communist] party." She later testified to CUAC that activist and singer Paul Robeson had duped her into joining the CPUSA.[15] The expert testimonies by career anti-communists offered legitimacy as they emphasized their involvement with radical groups during the early 1930s. Few of these professionals achieved as much personal and financial reward for their service as J.B. Matthews.

Professional Anti-Communists

Joseph Matthews was an accomplished linguist, teacher, and executive at Consumers Research prior to his career as an anti-communist. Through the mid-

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[14] See Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972); *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton University Press, 1973); Milton Meltzter, *Violins & Shovels: The WPA Arts Projects* (New York: Delacorte, 1976); and *Art for the Millions*, Francis V. O'Connor, ed. (Boston: NY Graphic Society, 1975).

[15] "Says Reds Formed Women Shoppers," *New York Times,* 23 Jun 1940; Rena M. Vale, *Against the Red Tide* (Los Angeles: Standard Publications, 1953); Christopher Robert Deutsch, "Against the Red Tide: Rena M. Vale and the Long Red Scare in California " (MA Thesis, California State University, 2010).

1930s, Matthews identified as a fellow traveler, or "one who closely sympathizes with most of the aims of the [Communist] party but who is nevertheless just a 'middle-class intellectual.'"[16] He visited the Soviet Union five times, corresponded for the communist press, and spoke at a great number of rallies and meetings sponsored by radical groups. However, by 1938, Matthews renounced his earlier radicalism, embraced far Right ideologies, and branded himself as an anti-communist expert, saying:

> I propose to submit to the Congressional Committee some of my own intimate and extensive knowledge of the "united front." For a period covering the years 1932-1935, it is doubtful whether any other person in this country was associated more prominently that I with the Communist Party's so-called "innocents' clubs."[17]

Matthews created a new profession for himself as an anti-communist investigator and informant. When testifying a committee in Washington in 1948, he was asked, "What is your business?" and replied "Researching Communism."[18] Matthews' critics argued that he had never been the radical that he claimed and suggested that money, mental illness, and the desire for a power were at the heart of his new career path.[19] Whatever the reason, Matthews served as a leading intellectual force behind the anti-communist movement from the late 1930s through the early 1950s. Historian Ellen Schrecker describes Matthews as the "unofficial *éminence grise* of American anti-Communism," or a powerful decision-maker who operates behind the

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[16] J.B. Matthews, *The "United Front" Exposed* (New York: League for Constitutional Government, 1938), p. 14, Fromkin Collection.
[17] Matthews, *The "United Front" Exposed*, p. 5 Fromkin Collection.
[18] Washington State Joint Legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, *Second Report: Un-American Activities in Washington State* (Olympia, 1948), pp. 34-90.
[19] Matthew Josephson and Russell Maloney, "The Testimony of a Sinner: Profile of J.B. Matthews," *The New Yorker* (April 1944), p. 32, folder 40, box 1, Thomas Brooks/Colston Warne Collection, Consumer Movement Archives, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS (hereafter Warne Collection) Colston Warne, interviewed by Sybil Shainwal, April 1971, folder 59, box 2, Warne Collection.

scenes.[20] He directed research for the Dies Committee from 1939 until 1945, before moving on as a consultant on communist affairs for the Hearst Corporation. In June 1953, Joseph McCarthy appointed Matthews as research director under his Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Matthew's years of aggressive Red-baiting made him too many prominent enemies, notably the Protestant Church, and he was forced to resign in July 1953.[21]

With 75,000 official members spread across the country, the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) represented a small percentage of the population. Despite the sizeable number, its members were mostly on the fringe of society. Dies was tasked with demonstrating the dangerous, subversive nature of communism without prominent individuals and groups to accuse. Matthews offered a theory to explain the threat expanding the reach of the Dies Committee beyond the CPUSA. He maintained that the "united front" extended Communism's reach beyond its base, charging New Dealers, unions, and progressive and radical leftist groups with the intent of destroying capitalism from within. This theory gave Dies the necessary tool to go after progressives and offered Matthews a chance for revenge against those he believed wronged him during a strike in 1935.

In August 1938, Matthews gave his first testimony to the Dies Committee and published his memoirs entitled *The Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler*. Using both platforms, Matthews charged a number of prominent groups with communistic

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[20] Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 44.

[21] Around the time of his appointment, conservative magazine, *The American Mercury*, published an article he wrote entitled "Reds in our Churches," which referred to the Protestant clergy as "The largest single group supporting the Communist apparatus in the United States." The resultant outrage forced his resignation.

activities, including the Consumers Union and the League of Women Shoppers. He believed that his testimony was invaluable because of his "long and wide first-hand experience, which includes a personal acquaintance with almost every prominent radical in America."[22] Matthews testified that the Communist Party had deliberately formed consumer organizations to serve as fronts. In his prepared statement, he said that he served as a consultant during the early years of the LWS. After his testimony, Aline Davis Hays, national president of the LWS, sent a telegram to Dies that explained the bitter history between Matthews and the LWS and that he never was a member. She offered to appear before the committee to give her testimony refuting Matthews, but they did not allow her to bear witness.[23]

Matthews published his memoirs several months later, where he elaborated on his testimony. In both his report and book, he singled out Susan Jenkins and Arthur Kallet as "chief among the Communist Party members."[24] According to Matthews, Jenkins had spoken to him no fewer than six times about the LWS. As a founding member of the LWS, she sought his advice on the organization and the support of Consumers' Research, even bringing other members to meet with him. In candid detail, he portrayed Jenkins and Rebecca Drucker as ruthless radicals intent on using the LWS to further their political agendas.[25] Matthews claimed that Arthur

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[22] J.B. Matthews, "The 'United Front' Exposed: The Prepared Statement of Mr. J.B. Matthews, a 'Fellow Traveler,' before the Congressional Committee Investigating Un-American Activities," (New York: League for Constitutional Government, 1938), p. 30.
[23] "Tead Defends College: Says Brooklyn Staff and Students Have Right to Own Views," *New York Times,* 24 August 1938.
[24] Matthews, *The "United Front" Exposed*, p. 24, Fromkin Collection.
[25] Matthews claimed that Jenkins and Ducker told him that they opposed the LWS becoming "merely another letterhead 'united front.'" However, Ducker actively sought prominent names for the group's letterhead when the LWS was forming, including Ida Tarbell. See Rebecca Ducker, "Letter from Rebecca Ducker to Ida M. Tarbell, April 29, 1935," Reel # 03.1022.00, Tarbell Collection.

Kallet was key in the efforts to undermine the apolitical consumer movement for the good of Communism.[26] Both Jenkins and Kallet believed that Matthews sought revenge for their support during a workers' strike several years earlier that humiliated him and cost him a great deal financially.

Red-Baiting Consumers Groups

The 1935 labor dispute at Consumers' Research (CR) was bitter, pitting anti-union Board of Directors members F.J. Schlink and Matthews against strikers and their allies, including board member Arthur Kallet. Schlink had co-founded CR in 1929 in order to give "expert" advice to consumers. He appointed family members and close friends to the majority of seats on the Board of Directors so that he might manage the organization with an iron fist. Historian Lawrence Glickman contrasts the different fundamental beliefs of CR and the LWS, coining the phrase "technocratic individualists" to describe CR's focus on helping shoppers make personal decisions without connecting them to larger labor issues. CR saw themselves as experts and scientists, while the LWS considered themselves activists. Schlink, Matthews, and other far Right CR board members opposed unions and consumer cooperatives, and they believed consumers were "ignorant, impetuous, and naïve" and thus needed their expert advice.[27]

The strike was largely in response to extreme pay disparity and Schlink's authoritarian management. Schlink had appointed his wife to the board, and collectively, they received a yearly income of 11,000 dollars, while many of their workers earned less than fifteen dollars a week. Matthews had gone on the payroll

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[26] J.B. Matthews, *Odyssey of a Fellow Traveler,* (New York: Mount Vernon Publishers, 1938).
[27] Glickman, "The Strike in the Temple of Consumption," p. 110.

at CR in 1933 as the vice president and member of the board, earning an annual salary of 3,850 dollars. The strike began when Schlink fired three workers who had been organizing an AFL union. In response, in September 1935, forty workers, including Susan Jenkins, walked out, supporting those fired and protesting their low wages and Schlink's authoritarian management. They also demanded that Matthews be removed from the board, and that Kallet, who was fired as secretary of the board for siding with the strikers, be reinstated. Historian Matthew Hilton writes that Schlink and Matthews used "strikebreakers, minders, private detectives, and legal injunctions against their staff, inspiring [the strikers to write] a series of songs which wished them 'to hell' as 'liars and scabs.'"[28] The picket line became a violent space. For example, when a young female striker was injured, a mob from town began to throw rocks at the CR building to protest her injury. According to an article in *The New Yorker* profiling Matthews, "Led by Matthews, the non-striking employees answered with tear gas and blank cartridges."[29] This was the moment in which Matthews irreparably severed his reputation as a friend to radical or liberal causes.

Many liberals expressed their dismay that an organization associated with progressive ideals would have such labor strife, and they hoped for a speedy settlement. Counsel for the strikers told the media, "To find Consumers Research on the same side of the fence of with the monopolistic corporations it has hitherto

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[28] Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity for All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 31. Also, see Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
[29] Matthew Josephson and Russell Maloney, "The Testimony of a Sinner: Profile of J.B. Matthews," *The New Yorker* (April 1944), p. 32, folder 40, box 1, Warne Collection.

criticized is indeed ironical."[30] Liberals, including librarian Florence Mason, a former colleague of Schlink's from another non-profit organization, cancelled their subscriptions to CR and asked for refunds, citing CR's poor treatment of workers.[31] Business elites whose products had been maligned by CR used their strike to their advantage. They Red-baited and disparaged Schlink and the organization, calling CR "business censors" and the "Poison Pen of New Jersey."[32]

The LWS conducted an investigation into the labor dispute and sided with the workers. In the fall of 1935, five members of the LWS traveled to New Jersey to interview Schlink and the striking workers. Schlink was unwilling to speak with the LWS while the workers were not. After hearing the workers' grievances, the LWS marched in solidarity with workers on the picket line and published articles stating their support in *The Woman Shopper*.[33]

In January 1936 the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) sided with the strikers. The NLRB ordered CR to offer to rehire the employees they fired and those who went on strike, recognize the union, and "pay $1,000 to union members for wages lost." [34] The NLRB stated that failure to implement these changes would result in their prosecution in a federal court.[35] A number of workers left CR, joining Arthur Kallet and Amherst professor Colston Warne to form a new organization

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[30] "Consumers Research Sees Plot in Strike," *New York Times,* 5 December 1935.
[31] Florence Mason, interviewed by Sybil Shainwald, February 1972, folder 39, box 2, Warne Collection.
[32] Frank Dalton O'Sullivan, *The Poison Pen of New Jersey* (Chicago: O'Sullivan Publishing House, 1936).
[33] Helene Frankel, "Mr. Schlink of N.J.," *The Woman Shopper* (November 1935), Folder 424, Box 25, CL of M Records.
[34] "Matthews Meets Denials, Attacks," *New York Times*, 11 December 1939.
[35] "Research Concern Told to Rehire 3," *New York Times*, 29 January 1936.

called Consumers Union (CU).[36] CU maintained a similar format of testing consumer goods and publishing their findings in a newsletter, and also sought to implement changes in order to show their commitment to workers. They lowered the subscription price of their newsletter, included information about working conditions, and organized a committee to advise them on labor issues. Their subscriptions quickly outpaced CR's as liberal consumers shifted their loyalties. Glickman writes that Schlink and Matthews, who accused the strike leaders of staging a communist coup against CR, became "premature anticommunists" with "long careers of searching for subversives in consumer organizations, which had become [fronts]."[37] Matthews stayed at CR for two years after the strike, and proclaimed that he was prouder of the strike outcome that anything else he had accomplished. However, his lucrative and ego-boosting side job of lecturing to liberal crowds was cut short due to his sullied reputation as a strikebreaker, which he resented and blamed on both the strikers and their prominent allies, including the LWS and American Civil Liberties Union founder Roger Baldwin.[38] Thirty years after J.B. Matthews accused CU of acting as a communist front, CU founder Colston Warne remembered Matthews as an "utterly irresponsible cuss but he was awfully persuasive on a platform."[39]

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[36] Warne taught economics courses at the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in the late 1920s and early '30s, and enjoyed close relationships with consumer activists such as National Consumers League President and Assistant Secretary of Labor and Director of the United States Women's Bureau Esther Peterson. Colston Warne, "Report on Activities and Associations, 1930-53" (March 1953), folder 1, box 2, Warne Collection.
[37] Glickman, "The Strike in the Temple of Consumption," pp. 123, 121.
[38] Josephson and Maloney, "The Testimony of a Sinner."
[39] Colston Warne, interviewed by Sybil Shainwal, April 1971, folder 59, box 2, Warne Collection.

After his initial testimony to the committee, Dies hired Matthews as the chief investigator, while he also served as a contact for the media wanting inside information about the hearings. In December 1939, he gave his full report on the consumer movement to an exclusive subcommittee comprised of Dies, accusing fourteen organizations of communistic behavior. Dies then leaked the report to the media, who wasted no time printing it, along with their commentary. With headlines like "Dies Investigator Says Reds Utilize Consumer Groups," corporate-owned newspapers gave legitimacy to Matthews' testimony. The *New York Times*, which undoubtedly relied on advertising dollars, published an article highlighting Matthews statement that "Communists worked actively to destroy the power of advertising because they realized that it was an essential element in the capitalist system." He argued that "is a revolutionary tactic worthy of a great deal of attention." According to Matthews, the Dies Committee would only be able to give that attention if they received additional funding.[40]

Several members of the committee expressed their concern with the manner in which Dies heard the report. New Mexico Representative John Dempsey claimed to know nothing about Matthew's report, describing it as "a very unusual proceeding." California Representative Jerry Voorhis went further and told the media that the report was "purely and simply [Matthew's] opinion," the committee had not conducted any hearings, and none of the accused had been called to give their testimony.[41] He accused the committee of being "undemocratic" because of the

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[40] "Dies Investigator Says Reds Utilize Consumer Groups," *New York Times*, 11 December 1939.
[41] Voorhis was a strong supporter of Roosevelt and the New Deal. He lost his seat in the House of Representatives to Richard Nixon, who called him a "fellow traveler."

one-sided manner of the research and release of the Matthews report. Voorhis framed the subjects of the report as gentle reformers, stating:

> I believe the committee is put in a very difficult position by releasing a report which attempts to brand as Communist intrigue protests against high milk prices, the teachings of young women to be wise buyers, or the efforts of consumers to secure the honesty in advertising.

The underlying message that Voorhis conveyed was that if Dies went after consumers groups in such an undemocratic fashion, anyone could be next. Voorhis downplayed their alleged radicalism in favor of highlighting their mainstream mission of ethical consumerism within a capitalist framework.[42]

Some media outlets believed that Dies had overstepped his power when he targeted the LWS. Liberal journalists Robert Allen and Drew Pearson wrote a nationally syndicated column called "The Washington-Merry-Go-Round" to expose prominent officials who they believed were acting against the public good. After Matthews report was leaked in December 1939, Allen and Pearson wrote, "Congressman Dies may not realize it yet, but he just made the greatest mistake of his entire un-American activities career." He had ignored the rule that a successful public figure does not attack women. Consistently describing the LWS membership as "ladies," Allen and Pearson wrote that they uncovered a secret dinner meeting between J.B. Matthews and "various big shot manufacturers [who] advised him on strategy" that took place prior to his testimony. Dinner guests informed the LWS that the manufacturers and Matthews discussed using the term "communist" to describe the LWS, CU, and other consumers groups. Also present was F.J. Schlink,

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[42] "Report of Dies' Aide Assailed," *The Milwaukee Journal*, 11 December 1939; "Voorhis Denounces Dies' Procedure," *Ellensburg Daily Record*, 11 Dec 1939; "'Close to Deception' Says Congressman Voorhis of Committee Charges," *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, 25 June 1942.

leading the LWS to accuse the Dies Committee of favoring one consumers group over the others.[43]

Prominent figures criticized the overly zealous Red-baiting of both women and girls, disparaging the idea that liberal groups and child actresses were intent on undermining capitalism and the American government. When asked for her opinion of the report denouncing the LWS, Eleanor Roosevelt said that she had no comment until she saw evidence, and that she had once been a member. In an earlier testimony, Matthews included ten-year-old Shirley Temple on his list of Hollywood subversives. Members of the Roosevelt administration spoke out against the Red-baiting of a child actress, and activists picketed in front of the room where the committee met.[44] However, despite the concern expressed by a handful of officials and the lack of witnesses corroborating Matthews' testimony, Dies and much of the media accepted his version of the truth. When the *New York Times* published two articles on December 11, 1939 after Matthews' report was leaked, the article contradicting his testimony was buried on page fourteen while the article supporting him was prominently displayed on the front page.[45]

Media and the Red Scare

Conservative politicians, employers, and newspapermen worked together to undermine consumer groups and New Deal policies that cut into their profits. Far Right conservatives received great support from media magnates. For example, the

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[43] Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, "The Washington-Merry-Go-Round," *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* 23 December 1939.

[44] Five teenage girls dressed as Shirley Temple and carried signs reading, "Tut, tut, Mr. Dies. Shirley Temple is not a subversive." See "Five Shirley Temples Picket Dies Committee, "*The Montreal Gazette*, 26 August 1938.

[45] "Dies Investigator Says Reds Utilize Consumers Groups," *New York Times*, 11 December 1939; "Matthews Meets Denials, Attacks," *New York Times*, 11 December 1939

New York Times emphasized the tense relationships that the LWS had with business. In May 1940, Morris Perla, a New York pharmacy owner filed a $50,000 suit against the group and several board members for libel. Perla claimed the LWS circulated untrue letters highlighting his union-busting anti-worker policies. The case was dismissed for lack of evidence, though the media neglected to report this fact.[46]

Few media magnates were as reliably anti-communist and anti-New Deal as William Randolph Hearst and Robert McCormick. Hearst published twenty-eight newspapers and controlled many magazines and radio stations. McCormick published several newspapers, including the widely circulated *Chicago Tribune*. Collectively, the two men controlled a significant portion of the media as Hearst's newspapers enjoyed a readership of roughly thirty million and the *Tribune* with one million readers. Hearst, McCormick, and other media magnates used their power to record and ultimately promote the Second Red Scare. McCormick was the single largest financial contributor to Roosevelt's opponent in 1936, and wrote editorials titled "The Communists Want Roosevelt" and "Mr. Roosevelt Reissues the Communist Manifesto."[47] McCormick, a member of Chicago's prominent McCormick family, was known for his eccentricities, such as ordering the star representing Rhode Island cut out of the American flag flying outside of the *Tribune* after Democrats had bested the Republicans in a series of court appointments.[48] Historian Richard Norton Smith writes that McCormick used the *Tribune*, which had

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[46] "$50,000 Libel Suit Filed," *New York Times*, 23 May 1940.
[47] "The Communists Want Roosevelt," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 27 December 1943; "Mr. Roosevelt Reissues the Communist Manifesto," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 7 September 1938.
[48] McCormick's lawyers advised him to replace the flag with a tradition forty-eight star flag since mutilating the flag was a crime. See William Gerald McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A History*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986) p. 203.

the largest readership of all standard-sized newspapers in the country as ''a megaphone to amplify the publisher's caprices.''[49] They highlighted the close connections between the New Deal Democrats and leftist organizations, making it seem like a dire plot, though, as Landon Storrs points out "because the employer and press conservatives colluded *secretly* with their allies in government, unlike the consumer groups, charges of conspiracy would seem more fittingly directed at the Right (emphasis in original)."[50]

Media outlets covered the Dies Committee's hearings in great deal, running stories with salacious headlines. However, few were as vicious as the *Chicago Tribune* who published articles challenging the New Deal cultural programs entitled, "Links Writers on WPA Projects to Communists," "The Federal Art Racket," and "Witnesses Tell Red Teachings in WPA Guidebooks, "WPA Theater Project Called Haven of Reds," and "Bare Reds' Use of Relief Cash in Propaganda."[51] In May 1939, the *Tribune* published a scathing article condemning the LWS for "conducting an ingenious campaign of intimidation to restrain criticism and even coerce support" of the New Deal, particularly the Wagner Act and National Labor Relations Board.[52] While accusing the LWS of threatening corporations, the *Tribune* included the names, occupations, and photographs of five prominent members, often tying them to the New Deal through their husbands' positions. Matthews' first testimony was

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[49] Richard Norton Smith, *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick, 1880-1955* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 261.
[50] Storrs, "Left-Feminism, p. 44.
[51] "Links Writers on WPA Projects to Communists," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 16 Septmber 1938; "The Federal Art Racket," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 May 1938; "WPA Theater Project Called Haven of Reds" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 August 1938; "Bare Reds' Use of Relief Cash in Propaganda," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 December 1938; "Witnesses Tell Red Teachings in WPA Guidebooks," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 November 1938.
[52] "Bare Campaign of Intimidation on Wagner Act," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 7 May 1939.

cited as legitimate evidence of the group's status as a communist front. The *Tribune* failed to report the support the LWS gave a Chicago Newspaper Guild strike earlier in the year.[53]

Scholars have long argued that corporate-controlled media manifests a direct threat to democracy.[54] In *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, historian Landon Storrs suggests that the so-called "press lords" sustained unprecedented power and influence on the American public as journalists, publishers, elected officials, and professional anti-communists collectively targeted the New Deal and the worker and consumer movement. Right-leaning media misinformed the public with half-truths that attacked activists. These practices allowed corporate interests free reign to further their political and financial agendas without media scrutiny.[55]

Establishing Conservative Institutions

In addition to utilizing popular media outlets to their advantage, the extreme Right used their financial resources to create their own institutions to shape policy and culture. Corporate funded radio stations, publications, and think tanks emerged in this era to provide a strong foundation for the anti-communist, conservative backlash to the New Deal and pro-worker activists.[56] Eugene Lyons, another

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[53] In January 1939, a court found that Randolph Hearst had interfered with union organizing in Chicago, a violation of the Wagner Act. For more information on the contentious relationship between the LWS and Hearst Magazines, see Storrs, "Left-Feminism."
[54] Robert McChesney, *Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); Christopher R. Martin, *Framed!: Labor and the Corporate Media* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
[55] Landon Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
[56] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

prominent reformed radical and journalist, coined the phrase "Red Decade" to describe what he believed as the nation's infatuation with Stalinist Communism in the 1930s. At the same time, Lyons served as the New York editor for *The American Mercury*, a prestigious magazine which featured writing by some of the most important intellectuals of the 1920s and '30s, including Clarence Darrow, William Faulkner, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Langston Hughes, before it transitioned to a conservative, anti-Semitic periodical. *The American Mercury* published essays that sought to undermine the influence of Roosevelt's policies with lines like "ever since the New Deal dawned on a believing and bewildered America, the communist movement has enjoyed its own More Abundant Life." Though presenting one particular essay on Communism as unbiased, the *Mercury* published the piece and claimed that radicals' desired to "loot Wall Street and rape Park Avenue."[57] In 1941, Lyons published a book entitled *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Perpetration of America,* which "vouchsafed" that the LWS was a "group under communist influence, with non-communists present."[58] Members of the LWS were among the fifty-two arrested for their support on the picket line during a strike at *The American Mercury* in 1935.

Henry Hazlitt, who served as editor for *The American Mercury*, became an important figure among the intellectual Right. A founding member of the Foundation of Economic Education (FEE), one of the nation's oldest libertarian think-tanks, and publisher of twenty-five works on economics and philosophy,

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[57] David Allen Ross, "The Professional Communist," *The American Mercury* 38, No. 148 (April 1936).
[58] Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), p. 376, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI.

Hazlitt influenced public figures, such as Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, and Ronald Reagan.[59] Hazlitt served as editor for a far Right monthly publication called *The Freeman* in the early 1950s. Wealthy elites, including the du Pont brothers, secured funding for *The Freeman* to be published by the FEE.

The Freeman devoted a great deal of its pages to Red-baiting consumers groups, including the LWS and CU. In 1952, they published an article claiming that CU was "one of the most effective Communistic fronts, under the guise of protecting the consumer, conducts a war upon the American economy."[60] *The Freeman* focused on CU's ongoing inclusion on HUAC's list of subversive organizations and singled out roughly a dozen alleged radicals connected to CU, including Arthur Kallet and Susan Jenkins. However, their most substantial critique focused on CU's support for government regulation of consumer goods and their suspicion of advertising. Indeed, during World War II, CU organized a campaign criticizing wartime advertising as the costs were built into contracts, adding to war debt for future taxpayers.[61] However, the organization was forced to become more cautious about its support for labor during its years on the list of subversive organizations. Co-founder Colston Warne admitted that the Dies committee changed the whole nature of CU's management as it became more conservative. While early examples of CU's newsletter *Consumer Reports* include labor ratings and an "unfair list" of

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[59] According to FEE's website, their mission is "to offer the most consistent case for the 'first principles' of freedom: the sanctity of private property, individual liberty, the rule of law, the free market, and the moral superiority of individual choice and responsibility over coercion." http://www.fee.org/ (Last accessed on July 25, 2012).

[60] Larston Farrar, "Consumers Union: A Red Front," *The Freeman* 2, No. 22 (July 1952), pp. 726-728. Ludwig von Mises Institute Digital Archives: http://mises.org/journals/OldFreeman/ (Accessed on July 25, 2012).

[61] Florence Mason, interviewed by Sybil Shainwald, February 1972, folder 39, box 2, Warne Collection.

manufacturers in the middle of labor disputes, these features quickly disappeared.[62] By the time that HUAC removed CU from its list of subversive organizations, it had spent so much effort proving that it was not a Communist front that it was no longer a strong ally for workers.

While the LWS had formally disbanded in 1949, the Right continued attacking the group into the 1950s. The May 1954 issue of *The Freeman* included an article written by Helen Woodward, an original member of the LWS, entitled "How I Joined a Red Front." Woodward was born to Jewish immigrant parents from Eastern Europe and achieved a successful career as a copywriter and advertising executive. In addition to her involvement with the LWS, she was a member of the Women's Trade Union League and fundraised for the socialist newspaper, the *New York Call*.[63] By the 1950s, Woodward had shifted her politics and became president of the New Jersey chapter of a pro-McCarthy, "extreme right-wing organization that favor[ed] isolationism" called Pro America.[64] Published alongside articles condemning labor unions and publicly owned energy sources, Woodward's essay in *The Freeman* documented a sinister organization capable of furthering the spread of Communism. Woodward wrote that she joined the LWS in order to support unions, but instead found a group that calculated every decision in order to achieve notoriety and headlines at the expense of workers and consumers. She condemned their tactics as "amateurish" and mocked their efforts to support organized labor,

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[62] *Consumers Union Reports (*May 1936), folder 28, box 1; Warne Collection.
Colston Warne, interviewed by Sybil Shainwald, April 1971, folder 59, box 2, Warne Collection.
[63] Ben Hanford, "Trade Unionists and the Call One Day's Wage Fund," *The New York Call*, 6 September 1909.
[64] "New Jersey Republicans Split by McCarthy-Liberals Struggle," *Geneva Daily Times* 7 October 1954.

particularly the Domestic Workers Union. Distancing herself from the group, Woodward wrote about the Board's radical plans that she undermined and how she "felt silly at having been duped." She gave tips to identify a Communist front group, finding a conspiracy in every suggestion, leadership change, and behavior within meetings. Ultimately, Woodward concluded, "no group of consumers can be of any help to a labor union."[65] That this was published roughly seventeen years after her involvement with the LWS suggests a continued anxiety among professional anti-communists to discredit the solidarity activism of the 1930s.

Financed through corporate donations, the Right organized think-tanks that would shape business and culture, political ideology, and public policy for decades. In 1947, a group made up of three former FBI agents formed the American Business Consultants, Inc. (ABC) to supplement the attention paid to alleged subversives. Funded by Alfred Kohlberg, a wealthy textile importer, close ally of Senator Joseph McCarthy, and co-founder of the John Birch Society, ABC investigated individuals and groups associated with Communism and published their findings in a weekly newsletter called *Counterattack*. In the June 1947, the newsletter claimed, "Don't expect full truth from govt (*sic*) list of Communist fronts, to be issued soon by Dept of Justice. Reason: [Attorney General] Tom Clark is afraid of being charged with playing politics if he names some of the biggest fronts."[66] In 1948, the newsletter

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[65] Helen Woodward, "How I Joined a Red Front," *The Freeman* 4, No. 17 (May 1954), pp. 594-6, Ludwig von Mises Institute Digital Archives: http://mises.org/journals/OldFreeman/ (Accessed on July 25, 2012).

[66] *Counterattack: The Newsletter of Facts on Communism* (June 1947), Radical Labor Publication Collection, Harvey A. Andruss Special Collections Library, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA (hereafter referred to as RLP Collection).

urged its readers to pressure Clark to add the LWS to the list of communist fronts.[67] Believing that the government's efforts to snuff out Communism were not strong enough, *Counterattack* published HUAC reports and added their own.[68]

In 1955, William F. Buckley, Jr. founded the *National Review*, what would become known as the most influential magazine for the growing conservative movement. Following in the footsteps of *The Freeman* and other early Red Scare-era publications, Buckley sought to organize the Right into a unified group who shared the same values and political views. In the *National Review's* mission statement, Buckley wrote:

> It is the job of centralized government (in peacetime) to protect its citizens' lives, liberty and property. All other activities of government tend to diminish freedom and hamper progress. The growth of government (the dominant social feature of this century) must be fought relentlessly.[69]

Buckley succeeded in forming a coalition of far Right activists who would support capitalism free of government restraints, aside from those in support of business interests.[70]

Conclusion

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[67] *Counterattack: Facts to Combat Communism* 54 (June 1948), RLP Collection.
[68] Additionally, ABC published special reports targeting specific industries, including *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television,* which marked the beginning of the blacklisting in entertainment in response to the alleged "infiltration" of 151 people in the radio and television industries linked to Communism. *Red Channels* brought radical anti-communist views into the mainstream as those listed as subversives were compelled to measure up to the standards set in *Counterattack*. See Nancy E. Bernhard*, U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[69] William F. Buckley Jr. "Our Mission Statement" (November 1955). National Review Website: http://www.nationalreview.com/ (Accessed on July 29, 2012).
[70] For more on the rise of the New Right, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

In the wake of the backlash to the mid-1930s worker justice movement, the League of Women Shoppers disbanded in 1949, the Women's Trade Union League ceased to exist in 1950, and the National Consumers' League lost most of their influence. Under President Eisenhower, the Women's Bureau shifted its focus from promoting unions for women workers to becoming a bureaucratic agency allied with business. Groups such as the LWS encouraged female shoppers to be "citizen consumers" and use their purchasing power to support workers. According to historian Lizabeth Cohen, after the Red Scare crushed groups like the LWS, a new type of consumer emerged, the "purchaser consumer," who was driven by individual interests rather than a pursuit of justice.[71] Those who believed that it was grave mistake to publicly attack prominent women underestimated how far the extreme Right was willing to go to regain what they had lost in the Thirties as the state introduced a wide-reaching regulatory regime to implement newly won labor standards. Careers and fortunes were made through public and private-funded anti-communist institutions. While working conditions and pay improved for many in the wake of World War II prosperity, sweatshops continued to exist for the most marginalized citizens and immigrants. By the 1970s, American corporations alleged that the New Deal labor legislation would force them to relocate their factories to cities around the world with few restrictions on working conditions. While the American South had served as a profitable site of production for decades due to its pro-business, anti-union, and anti-regulation culture, it still had minimum wage and

[71] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2003).

maximum hour laws. In my next chapter, I will explore capital's continued search for a cheaper and even more pliable workforce.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I Didn't See Anyone Sweating": The Creation and Maintenance of the Global Race to the Bottom

In 1998, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History created an exhibition called "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 to Present." In addition to historical artifacts that tell the story of the Triangle Fire, it included a re-creation of a garment factory discovered outside of Los Angeles in 1995 that relied on forced labor. The curators also displayed images of historical anti-sweatshop activism, including a photograph of Eleanor Roosevelt sewing on the first union label. The exhibition was immediately the subject of controversy as Sam Johnson, House Speaker Newt Gingrich's appointee to the Smithsonian's Board of Regents Representative, argued that the exhibit was "faulty" because it portrayed sweatshops in a bad light. Johnson, a retired fighter pilot and homebuilder, said, "One of the reasons Newt appointed me was to keep the historical revisionism under control," suggesting that he was far more qualified to analyze and evaluate the history of some of the most tragic labor struggles in the US than the curators of the nation's most prestigious American history museum. A representative of industry seconded Johnson's complaint, though he unintentionally undermined its impact by saying, "It is very difficult to put on a sweatshop exhibit that is evenhanded."[1] The Right's attempt to redefine and revise the history of the sweatshop suggests that they were aware that their interests and policies enforced

[1] "Smithsonian `Sweatshop' Exhibit Sparks Dissent: Congressman Airs Clothiers' Objections," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 September 1997.

inhumane living and working conditions for impoverished men, women, and children around the world.

The 1990s served as the culmination of decades of work by conservative think-tanks and policy makers. The gap between the economic policies of the Democratic and Republican parties shrank as members of both parties used their power to advocate for business interests. The efforts of the conservative activists who were profiled in Chapter Four paid off by the 1980s and '90s. The triumph of the Right rendered many regulatory policies and agencies ineffective and encouraged the widespread reliance on sweatshop labor. The last few decades of the 20th century saw widespread deindustrialization and an increased reliance on low-wage, low-skill jobs in the United States and abroad. Officials sympathetic to sweatshop workers had to adapt to a new landscape of global capitalism and aggressive consumerism, but they had few resources to combat labor abuses.

In this chapter, I will examine the business and political elites' creation of a new global landscape favorable to investors that relied on a young, undereducated, and impoverished workforce. Sweatshops emerged in global cities across the world in American cities like San Francisco, New York, and Saipan, as well as Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Shēnzhèn, China; Choloma, Honduras; and Dhaka, Bangladesh. Factories were often isolated geographically or culturally, separating consumers from the means of production. The operators of domestic sweatshops found the cracks within the regulatory regime, which had been weakened throughout the 1980s and '90s, allowing factories reliant of exploited labor to flourish without signaling any red flags to investigators, consumers, or the media. Workers in global

sweatshops often lived in dormitories attached to remote factories while they produced consumer goods, including toys, apparel, iPods, laptops, safety pins, and Coca-Cola.[2] During the 1990s, a series of highly publicized scandals demonstrated the connection between increasingly pro-business political policies and the widespread reemergence of sweatshops.

Undoing the New Deal

Significant gains were made in the textile and garment industries during and after World War II as many waged workers began to enjoy forty-hour workweeks, overtime pay, safety inspections, and living wages. While sweatshops in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles continued to employ severely marginalized Americans, namely Latina and Asian immigrants, throughout the 1950s and '60s, they were rare. The Second Red Scare had squashed the more radical elements of consumer and labor groups. Both the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations supported Cold War policies and purged communists from their ranks. The two groups merged in 1955 to become the AFL-CII, and its members enjoyed unprecedented power. By the early 1950s, one-third of the American labor forced belonged to union. The strength of organized labor, the post-war economic growth, access to the G.I. Bill and social programs allowed working and middle-class Americans to afford their own homes and college tuition for their children. The high employment and low interest rates also allowed them to

[2] Bender, *Sweatshop USA;* Jill Louise Esbenshade, *Monitoring Sweatshops: Workers, Consumers, and the Global Apparel Industry* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Kelsey Timmerman, *Where am I Wearing: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

participate in the rising consumer culture of the post-war period.[3] This period of prosperity for American workers was short lived, however, and by the 1970s, the postwar boom had ended.[4]

Rising inflation and unemployment, a flood of imported goods from overseas manufacturers, and an economic recession in the mid-1970s signaled the end of economic prosperity for many Americans. Just as the southern textile industry was desegregating in the 1970s, many of these corporations claimed they were not able to compete with foreign companies.[5] Historian James Cobb writes, "There is a grim irony in the fact that the South, having worked so diligently to create a business climate attractive to footloose industries, should now find its economic future threatened by an increase in industrial mobility."[6] In 1965, jobs in the manufacturing sector accounted for over of a quarter of the American workforce, but by 2006, they made up just twelve percent.[7] The end of the postwar boom did not impact all Americans equally, however. Economist Paul Krugman notes that at

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[3] Donald Albrect, *World War II and the American Dream: How Wartime Building Changed a Nation* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1995); Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); William M. Rohe and Harry L. Watson, *Chasing the American Dream: New Perspectives on Affordable Homeownership* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

[4] A number of scholars have critiqued the dominant narrative of the post-war "Golden Age" as overly simplistic, arguing that the economic conditions were more complex. See *The Golden Age of Capitalism: Reinterpeting the Postwar Experience*, ed. Stephen Alan Marglin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Michael J. Webber and David L. Rigby, *The Golden Age Illusion: Rethinking Postwar Capitalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996).

[5] For more on the struggle to fight racial discrimination in southern factories, see Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*; Robert S. Smith, *Race, Labor & Civil Rights: Griggs v. Duke Power and the Struggle for Equal Employment Opportunity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); and Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[6] James C. Cobb, "The Southern Business Climate: A Historical Perspective," *Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy 1*, no. 2 (1986), p. 98.

[7] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, International Trade by Commodities Database. Paris: OECD, 2006)

the same time, the pay for top executives rose from thirty-nine times what average workers earned to over 1,000 times that of workers.[8]

Corporations sought new environments for their factories in order to keep profits high in a modern era of global competition. In the 1970s and 1980s, American companies increasingly sought to employ workers in the Global South, primarily Latin America and Southeast Asia, to manufacture textiles and garments for U.S. markets.[9] Corporations hoping to save money and get around labor laws also concentrated production in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, where there were large populations of immigrant women, both documented and undocumented. In both of these cases, workers, typically young women, labored in filthy and unsafe factories, were subject to frequent sexual harassment and assault as well (as other forms of verbal and physical abuse), earned far less than a living wage, had very little autonomy outside of work hours, were prohibited from forming a union, and were often forced to get abortions if they become pregnant.[10]

In the midst of deindustrialization, President Ronald Reagan set out to redefine the relationships between government, employers, and workers by weakening and undoing many of the standards of the New Deal as well as the newer institutions enacted under the Johnson and Nixon administrations.[11] Reagan's administration marked a return to earlier eras as his policies widened the income

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[8] Paul Krugman, "For Richer," *New York Times*, 20 October 2002.
[9] Steven C. High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Cowie, *Capital Moves.*
[10] Ching Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors.*
[11] For more on the programs and regulatory agencies created during the Johnson and Nixon's presidencies, see *The Great Society And The High Tide Of Liberalism,* ed. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Kim McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners:* Big *Business in American Politics, 1945-1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

gap, weakened American labor laws and unions, and gutted both New Deal and Great Society programs and policies.[12] In 1981, Reagan famously fired 13,000 striking air traffic controllers effectively telling employers that the government would side with them over workers. He also appointed corporate lawyer Donald Dotson as chair of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Dotson believed that "unionized labor relations have been the major contributors to the decline and failure of once-healthy industries" and have caused "destruction of individual freedom." His NLRB settled about half as many complaints as the board under the previous administration, and they averaged approximately three years to rule on the complaints. Reagan closed one-third of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) field offices, seeking "voluntary compliance" from employers on safety matters.[13] He appointed construction company executive Thorne Auchter to head the agency, who went on to destroy OSHA booklets on Brown Lung disease because they were "anti-business." Under Auchter, injuries and illnesses in the meatpacking, steel, and textile industries increased while OSHA offered little protection.[14]

Reagan and his successor, George H.W. Bush, made significant cuts to the Department of Labor (DOL) budget. In 1982, Secretary of Labor Raymond Donovan sought to weaken child labor protections by advocating that young workers be paid

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[12] For more on the weakening of the New Deal order, see Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. Fraser and Gerstle; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*.
[13] OSHA's staffing dropped from 2,951 in 1980 to 2,211 in 1987. See American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect: A State-by-state Profile of Worker Safety and Health in the United States" (2009).
[14] For example, from 1982 to 1985, the steel industry's work force dropped from 394,000 to 304,900, lost workdays due to injuries increased by twenty percent. See David Kusner, "Death on the Job: OSHA under the Company Thumb," *The Multinational Monitor* 8, no. 5 (May 1987).

less than the minimum wage, reducing the list of occupations too hazardous for children, and extending the number of hours per day and week that children could work. One policy maker stated that "[u]nreasonable and artificial impediments to the employment of all age groups should be eliminated."[15] Like in earlier decades, political elites masked their goal of creating or maintaining a cheap, unregulated workforce for employers, while feigning concern for workers' freedoms. Reagan's administration publicized letters from children, parents, and employers urging greater "flexibility" for child workers. Restaurant operators were among the most vocal about their support to ease child labor laws to allow for teenaged dishwashers and busboys. While the proposals spent years in committees, the child labor laws were not restructured.

As Reagan's DOL put the welfare of children workers "low on the end of the priority list," both the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the National Consumers' League (NCL) began independent investigations into child labor practices.[16] After growing media coverage of American sweatshops, Congress asked the GAO to study the problem and provide a report. The GAO concluded that child labor violations and injuries had radically increased due to the lax enforcement of the Reagan appointees, particularly in garment, construction, agricultural, and the restaurant and entertainment industries.

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[15] U.S. Congress, House Subcommittee on Labor Standards, Committee on Education and Labor, *Oversight Hearings – Proposed Changes in Child Labor Regulations,* 97th Congress, 2nd Session, Jul 28 and Aug 3, 1982.

[16] William Whitaker, *Child Labor in America:* History, Policy, and Legislative Issues (Hauppague, NY: Nova Publishers, 2004), p. 21.

President Bush appointed Elizabeth Dole as his Secretary of Labor, and she took a greater interest in reducing child labor abuses. The investigations conducted by the GAO and NCL fueled growing concern among members of Congress, and in response, the DOL launched "Operation Child Watch," a series of inspections to enforce the current labor laws.[17] Despite the inspections, a 1991 report by the GAO concluded "illegal employment of minors remains a significant problem."[18] The DOL's diminished resources kept the agency from providing support to the thousands of children working in unsafe environments. The DOL did not seek legislative reforms to curb the abuses, and at least one congressperson believed that Operation Child Watch was little more than "occasional public relations events."[19] The DOL's continued budget cuts throughout the 1980s and early '90s were part of a broader trend that rejected the state's power as a means of regulating business.

The political agenda that gained momentum ufnder Reagan and Bush largely continued in the policies of President Bill Clinton, whose Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) sought to make the Democratic party more business friendly. The DLC formed in order to shift the Democratic Party away from the influence of left-leaning voices that had emerged during the 1960s. Economics professor Michael Meeropol argues, "The Reagan Revolution had succeeded in shackling even a reform-minded Democratic president supposedly working with a like-minded

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[17] Bureau of National Affairs, *Daily Labor Report*, November 22, 1989.
[18] Congress, House, Committee on Government Operations, Subcommittee on Employment and Housing Labor's Child Labor Enforcement Efforts: Developments after Operation Child Watch, Statement of Sarah F. Jaggar, Director for Operations, Human Resources Division, GAO Form 160.
[19] Whitaker, *Child Labor in America*, p. 22.

Democratic majority in Congress."[20] During his presidential campaign, President Reagan shaped the narrative of the "welfare queen," a mythical unmarried, overweight, African-American woman who bred children in order to collect checks from the government that allowed her to purchase multiple Cadillacs. Both Democrats and Republicans used this manufactured example to cite the dependency that welfare created for its users. Clinton campaigned on welfare reform, and in 1996, he passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), destroying much of the New Deal safety net, which had provided assistance for poor Americans.[21]

Upon its passage, unpaid child labor no longer counted as "work," forcing many low-income mothers to seek whatever wage-earning employment was available. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a lobbying group representing the interests of American business, hailed PRWOWA as reaffirmation of "America's work ethic."[22] Welfare right activist and historian Francis Fox Piven argues that low-income Americans needed the safety net not because of a poor work ethic, but because of the lack of jobs available for unskilled workers. Piven writes, "If there were jobs that paid living wages, and if health care and child care were available, a great many women on [welfare] would leap at the chance of a better income and a

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[20] Michael Meeropol, *Surrender: How the Clinton Administration Completed the Reagan Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 236.
[21] Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).
[22] Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

little social respect."[23] Women pushed off of welfare were forced into minimum wage jobs that offered little chance for advancement or even survival.[24]

Clinton also brokered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) eliminating trade and investment barriers between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and accelerating deindustrialization in the U.S. NAFTA and other "free trade" agreements offered promises to investors that the state would not stand in the way of business interests and gave corporations the right to sue national governments to challenge labor and environmental policies that impacted their ability to maximize profits. American and Canadian corporations quickly shifted their production to *maquiladoras,* foreign-owned assembly plants on the American-Mexican border, which primarily employed young women.[25]

Robert Reich

But while Clinton's policies were largely anti-worker, his Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich, was a strong ally in the fight against American sweatshops. Robert Reich was a leading economics theorist and professor at Harvard University who had also been a civil servant in Washington, D.C. under the Carter administration doing consumer protection work. After spending one term in Clinton's administration Reich left office to teach at Brandeis University and write books. In 2008, Reich published *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy,*

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[23] Frances Fox Piven, *The Breaking of the American Social Compact*, (New York: New Press, 1998), p. 169

[24] For more on the demonization of poor women and welfare recipients, see Ruth Sidel, *Keeping Women and Children Last: America's War on the Poor* (New York: Penguin Press, 1998); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[25] Altha J. Cravey, *Women and Work in Mexico's Maquiladoras* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Kathryn Kopinak, *Desert Capitalism: Maquiladoras in North America's Western Industrial Corridor* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

and Everyday Life, arguing that the current relationship between business and politics undermines democracy and creates massive social problems. Soon after his appointment, Reich began to work on campaigns to fight sweatshops at home and abroad immediately. But in spite of a Democratic administration and majority in both Houses, Congress blocked his efforts. If Reich wanted to enforce labor laws, he would have to do it without the financial support and political will of the White House. Years of cuts during the 1980s coupled with Clinton's emphasis on balancing the budget and reducing the federal deficit left the DOL a shell of its former self. It had a staff of only eight hundred to inspect six million work sites around the country. Reich had to rely on other means to fight worker exploitation.

The dominant narrative suggested that American sweatshops had been eliminated in the early 1900s and those in existence in the 1990s were in the Global South. Many consumers believed that a label bearing the phrase "Made in the USA" signaled that workers who earned a living wage manufactured the product in a safe and clean environment. However, in 1995, Reich said, "If anybody doubts that there are sweatshops operating illegally and exploiting workers in this country, you must listen carefully to these stories."[26] According to Reich, approximately half of the employees in the garment industry were not receiving the minimum wage, and that one-third worked in extremely dangerous conditions. Many workers were undocumented, making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Workers trying to form unions were often fired and deported. Based on their investigations and surveys, the DOL estimated that over half of New York's garment factories were

[26] "Sweatshop Workers Describe Experiences to Labor Secretary," *Baltimore Sun*, 13 September 1995.

sweatshops.[27] The investigations into child labor that had taken place during the Reagan and Bush years also pointed to major cracks within the regulatory regime. The reliance on child and sweated labor was a direct result of the "economic race to the bottom," in which businesses rejected U.S. labor laws in favor of an underworld economy operating in American cities with a dense population of first and second-generation immigrants.[28]

With few traditional resources to implement his anti-sweatshop campaign, Reich came up with creative alternatives. He appealed to the private sector to do better at self-monitoring, particularly the garment industry employers. Many manufacturers and corporations willingly adopted codes of conduct that would essentially certify them sweat-free, though they offered little evidence to indicate that they actually implemented the codes. The media were key in Reich's campaign against labor exploitation. Reich organized events tailored to news outlets, such as the release of the lists of corporations who agreed to his codes. The national media increased its coverage of sweatshops during the early Clinton years, with the *Los Angeles Times* using the term "sweatshop" in 124 stories in 1993 and 1994.[29] Print media and network news devoted a great deal of space and energy covering a series of scandals during the mid-1990s.

El Monte

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[27] Wage & Hour Division, U.S. Department of Labor, Garment Enforcement Report October 1995 - March 1996.
[28] Robert J.S. Ross, *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).
[29] Ibid., p. 209.

In 1995, California authorities raided a compound and discovered seventy-two Thai immigrants who had been held captive and forced to sew garments for up to eighteen hours a day for as little as seventy cents an hour. Most were young women in their late teens and early twenties. The SK Fashions factory, located in Los Angeles suburb El Monte, subdued its workforce with two full-time armed guards and threats of rape and other forms of violence if workers attempted escape. Additionally, razor wire and spiked bars topped the fences surrounding the compound. The workers were cut off from the outside world as their phone calls and mail were censored. The punishment for attempted escape was severe. Rojana Chenunchujit, who worked in the El Monte factory for five years, said, "Some people actually got punished. One person tried to escape but was unsuccessful; they beat him up pretty badly. It was unbearable to look at the worker who was beaten. After the beating you couldn't even recognize him at all."[30]

Sixty-two year old Suni Manasurangkun and her sons recruited impoverished women and men from Thailand and held them captive in a makeshift factory for up to seven years. The majority of those enslaved were young women who hoped to earn money to help their families in Thailand. The Manasurangkun family covered the travel costs for the Thais, telling them that they could easily repay the debt with the good wages they would earn. Once the operators withheld that money from the workers' paychecks, little was left for food and to send home to family members. Much like her southern predecessors, Manasurangkun operated a "company store" selling basic necessities at exorbitant prices, such as twelve-dollar deodorant.

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[30] Rojana Chenunchujit, interviewed by Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, March 25, 1997.

Because the operators locked the workers in the compound, they had no choice but to use the company store. Both the working and living quarters were horrific, and at least seven workers slept in mice and cockroach-infested rooms at a time.

Manasurangkun began the family-operated sweatshop in 1989, and it grew steadily as they received contracts from a variety of American retailers. In 1992, The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) investigated the factory, but chose not to continue after a federal judge refused to issue a search warrant. In the meantime, the Manasurangkun continued to enslave young female workers, and retailers such as Sears, Macy's, and Niemen Marcus continued to profit from their labor. Three years later, in 1995, one worker escaped through a ventilation shaft and provided sufficient testimony to justify a raid.

In addition to arresting the Manasurangkun family, INS placed the Thai workers in detention centers for interrogation. Refusing to treat them "differently from any other illegal immigrants in custody," INS officials kept the freed workers shackled during transportation between the detention center and legal meetings. Advocates for the Thais argued that they went from one prison operated by the Manasurangkuns to another operated by INS. A coalition of unions and community groups that would go on to form Sweatshop Watch (an organization that I will examine in Chapter Six) raised funds in order to secure the release of the workers on five hundred dollar bonds and arranged lodging with private families. Initially, the workers were given only temporary work permits so that they could remain in

the United States to testify, but seven years after their release, the INS granted them visas for permanent residency.[31]

Eight of the sweatshop operators pled guilty to charges including conspiracy, indentured servitude, and harboring undocumented immigrants in exchange for reduced sentences. Manasurangkun, however, said that the workers loved her and called her "Auntie" and that the whole thing happened because of her unfamiliarity with U.S. labor laws. She claimed she felt bad about what happened and tearfully said in court, "I ask the judge to have mercy on me and please be lenient."[32] The operators each received sentences ranging from seven years in jail to a $250,000 fine.

Secretary of Labor Reich used the public outrage over El Monte as a springboard for the DOL's "No Sweat" campaign in 1996. After the El Monte raid, Reich said, "Presumably, most consumers would rather not buy garments produced by slave labor in the United States and retailers would rather not sell them."[33] Using a tactic similar to that of the National Consumers' League during the Progressive Era, Reich publicized a "white list" of companies making efforts to avoid using sweated labor. Based on that presumption, the DOL issued a series of public service announcements encouraging ethical purchasing decisions. This approach utilized consumer and market pressure, rather than government-enforced fines or restrictions. Resisting any spotlight on their actions the National Retail Federation

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[31] Kenneth Noble, "Workers in Sweatshop Raid Start Leaving Detention Site," *New York Times,* 12 August 1995.
[32] Robin Abcarian, "You Will Never Look at Your Closet the Same Way Again," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May 1996.; Bill Wallace, "70 Immigrants Found In Raid on Sweatshop," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 4 August 1995.
[33] Kenneth Noble, "U.S. Warns Big Retailers about Sweatshop Goods," *New York Times*, 15 August 1995.

(NRF), the industry's largest trade association, fought back quickly. While the campaign was a way of industry policing itself, the NRF criticized Reich for "wasting millions of taxpayer dollars on counterproductive media witch hunts." He needed more support for his anti-sweatshop initiative, and Kathie Lee Gifford inadvertently provided it.

Kathie Lee Gifford

In the 1980s, many American corporations shifted their focus away from the production of goods in order to concentrate on creating brands. Liberal trade policies allowed them to transition the manufacturing of goods to sweatshops. They could rely on often overseas contractors and subcontractors to manage the production, leaving white-collar Americans to create a brand image. In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein documents this shift, noting that corporations were not merely selling products, but were also selling lifestyles. Trying to appeal to the youth market, companies like Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and McDonald's began to associate themselves with what youth considered "cool."[34] Few were as committed to and successful with the new marketing-based, brand-focused business strategy as Nike. Nike's CEO Phil Knight had sold running shoes since the 1960s and became a millionaire during the jogging craze of the 1970s. After step aerobics unseated jogging as the new fitness sensation, Knight chose to transform Nike as the supreme fitness company. Nike developed a partnership with professional basketball player Michael Jordan that associated his accomplishments on the basketball court with the brand. In 1985, Nike created a signature shoe for him called the Air Jordan that was immediately

[34] Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (New York: MacMillan, 2002).

popular. Even after Jordan's retirement, his shoes continued to have incredible sells that have made it a $1 billion a year business.[35] Additionally, Nike hired other elite athletes, such as Monica Seles, Carl Lewis, Andre Agassi, and Tiger Woods, spending over one billion dollars on advertising and promotion in 1998.[36]

Michael Jordan, along with Kathie Lee Gifford and Jaclyn Smith, was part of a explosion in celebrity branding that partnered athletes, musicians, actors, and public figures with products to increase their recognition. They served as ambassadors for brands but rarely had a voice in the production. When Jordan was asked about the workers in the Indonesian factories that made his Air Jordans, he said, "I don't know the complete situation. Why should I? I'm trying to do my job. Hopefully, Nike will do the right thing."[37] Corporations believed that consumers would focus on the icon, rather than the means of production. However, labor activists realized that the carefully cultivated brand images could render corporations vulnerable.

In April 1996, Charles Kernaghan, the Executive Director of the National Labor Committee (NLC), testified before a Congressional hearing on child labor that a Kathie Lee Gifford clothing line sold at Wal-Mart used sweatshop labor, employing children and pregnant women. While inspecting factories in Honduras, Kernaghan discovered that workers at Global Fashion were manufacturing garments that bore Gifford's label. Adding irony to insult, also on the label was the statement "A portion

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[35] In 2010 alone, approximately 10 million pairs were sold. See Patrick Johnson, "Air Jordans: 'Sneakerheads' Flock To Grab Retro Kicks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 December 2011.
[36] Jensen Holger, "Low Pay, High Desire: A Tale of 2 Swooshes in Indonesia," *Rocky Mountain News*, 2 July 2000.
[37] Stephanie Strom, "A Sweetheart Becomes Suspect; Looking Behind Those Kathie Lee Labels," *New York Times*, 27 June 1996.

of the proceeds from the sale of this garment will be donated to various Children's Charities." As a born-again Christian and co-host of the most popular syndicated talk show in the United States, *Live with Regis and Kathie Lee,* Gifford's name provided a wholesome and successful image to the clothing line.[38] Kernaghan recognized an opportunity in the contradiction between her image and the Honduran sweatshop.

As Charles Bowden of *Mother Jones* magazine writes, "Charlie Kernaghan opted for a simple tactic: shaming brand-name companies. He learned that if he took the shirt off your back and showed you the blood of children in the fabric, people would snap alert."[39] The NLC wrote Gifford letters asking for her support, claiming "perhaps no other person in the U.S. could have so important an impact, or make such a difference in cleaning up these sweatshop conditions as you could…you could move the entire industry to set new human rights standards." After a delayed response from Gifford and Wal-Mart's lawyers, Kernaghan decided to go public with his accusations. Several American television shows covered Kernaghan's testimony, in which he painted a grim picture of child labor. The media called for a response from Gifford. Using the platform of her talk show, she tearfully said she would never allow such conditions to take place and that the NLC was lying. She further claimed that Wal-Mart's inspectors had certified that the conditions at Global Fashion were in line with their code that prohibited their acceptance goods made in sweatshops.[40]

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[38] While Gifford earned seven million dollars for allowing clothes to be sold under her name, the workers were paid thirty-one cents per hour. Gifford estimated that her line brought 300 million dollars in profit for Wal-Mart in its first year.
[39] Charles Bowden, "Keeper of the Fire," *Mother Jones* (July/August 2003).
[40] Stephanie Strom, "A Sweetheart Becomes Suspect; Looking Behind Those Kathie Lee Labels," *New York Times*, 27 June 1996.

Wal-Mart's code of conduct was part of Secretary of Labor Reich's efforts to get employers to police themselves. Like most American corporations, Wal-Mart did not hire or oversee workers directly. Instead, the company contracted its manufacturing to vendors throughout the world, who often then subcontracted to individual factories. By distancing themselves form their assembly line, Wal-Mart executives could claim that they had no knowledge of child labor and sweatshop conditions and point to a clean report from the infrequent and often announced inspections. However, Union of Needle-trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) spokesperson Alan Howard argued, "[Corporations] know when they bid out a job at a certain price, there's only one way the garment can be made. That work is going to another sweatshop."[41] Rather than an isolated and insignificant occurrence, the Honduran sweatshop was the direct result of the lack of accountability to corporate decisions to maximize profits.

Upon conducting her own research, Gifford discovered that the Wal-Mart code did not prevent child labor or dangerous working conditions at its subcontracted factories. She quickly hired a public relations team to rehabilitate her tarnished image and sat for a friendly interview with Diane Sawyer, in which she pledged to hire inspectors to ensure that the clothing that bore her name were made in ethical conditions. Gifford's public relations disaster was not over yet, however.

Three weeks later, UNITE directed national media outlets to Seo Fashions, a sweatshop subcontracted by Wal-Mart to manufacture clothes for Gifford's line. Unlike the Honduran factory, Seo Fashions was located in New York City, just a few

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[41] Rob Howe, "Labor Pains," *People* 45, no. 23 (June 1996).

miles from the studio where *Live with Regis and Kathie Lee* taped. Workers had not received paychecks for weeks, and some were not earning a minimum wage. In addition to the poor pay, UNITE emphasized the unsanitary conditions. According to one worker, "Everything is dirty, the trash isn't picked up, and the two bathrooms aren't fit for pigs to use. There's never any soap or toilet paper, and the plumbing doesn't always work. So imagine the smell."

The intense media glare accomplished what Charles Kernaghan hoped for as the public paid attention to the sweatshop scandal. Gifford and her husband, ABC sportscaster and former football player Frank Gifford, worked hard to salvage her reputation. They visited the Seo Fashion factory, giving each worker 300 dollars in cash.[42] Frank Gifford promised that his wife would do her best to turn "something that is so disgusting and repugnant into something positive."[43] Along with her public relations team, the Giffords met with Secretary of Labor Robert Reich. They planned a Fashion Industry Forum as a space to begin to address sweatshop and encouraged celebrities with fashion lines to "speak out against exploitation in the garment industry."[44] The Forum provided elites the opportunity to speak out against sweatshops, which many of them undoubtedly found morally repugnant, but did little to combat the ills of global capital.[45] The Forum also allowed the Clinton

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[42] Gifford told *People* magazine, "We never saw the donation as a panacea for the sweatshop problem. Frank and I felt a moral and ethical responsibility because they were manufacturing clothing bearing my name...These people were in dire straits, and we had to do something to help." See Howe, "Labor Pains."

[43] Steven Greenhouse, "With $7,500 in Cash, Giffords Scramble to Save Face at Sweatshop," *New York Times*, 24 May 1996.

[44] George White, "Gifford to Help Reich in War on Sweatshops," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Jun 1996.

[45] Many activists and workers criticized the Forum, which took place in July 1996, as a means for brands to repair their image rather than implanting real standards to improve conditions. Co-director of the Nicaraguan Network Education Fund Katherine Hoyt reported that while three

administration to appease labor and human rights activists during an election year, while separating the issue of sweated labor from his initiatives like NAFTA and welfare reform. Though it had minimal policy impact, the anti-sweatshop activism that emerged during the El Monte and Kathie Lee scandals shifted the popular consciousness of the American public, providing opportunities and inspiration for subsequent activists.

Made in the USA

A third scandal that shaped the period spanned the 1990s and went into the mid-2000s exposed the powerful collusion between politicians and corporate leaders**.** In 1992, members of a Congressional committee organized a hearing regarding sweatshop labor in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The U.S. invaded the Mariana Islands during World War II and, after the war, administered them as a United Nations trust territory until 1976, when the islands became the third American commonwealth.[46] Though located 5,000 miles from the continental United States, because the CNMI is an American commonwealth, goods manufactured there could bear the "Made in the USA" label without enforcing American labor standards.[47]

The House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs held a hearing to received testimony related the "controversial clothing manufacturing industry" in

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hundred people attended the Forum, "retailers, manufacturers, and contractors, as well as representatives of labor (U.S. and international), consumers, academia, and human rights were all present, but industry dominated." See Katherine Hoyt, e-mail message to PeaceNet listserve, August 8, 1996.

[46] The Philippines had the status of commonwealth from 1934 until 1946, when it achieved independence following World War II. Puerto Rico was classified as a commonwealth in 1952, ending its colonial era.

[47] Karl Schoenberger, *Levi's Children:* Coming to Terms with Human Rights in the Global Marketplace (New York: Grove Press, 2001).

the CNMI. Thirty-four members of Congress wrote to the committee's chair, Representative George Miller, to request a hearing after the *Washington Post* published an article describing the products made with slave labor sold with "Made in the USA" labels.[48] The *Post* article highlighted the Tan family. In 1991, Levi Strauss & Co investigated their factories in Saipan and discovered "slavelike" conditions. They severed ties with their subcontractor Tan Holdings Corporation, which was forced to pay what was then the largest fine in U.S. labor history, paying more than $9 million in restitution to its employees. The U.S. DOL said that the Tan family routinely required ninety-hour weeks without overtime at less than the reduced minimum wage. In response to their growing concerns, the members of Congress urged immediate legislative reforms, including the application of U.S. minimum wage and immigration law. Miller organized a hearing to receive testimony from workers, lawyers, American union leaders, academics, industry leaders, factory operators, and government officials to determine whether to pursue congressional action.

The anti-sweatshop voices linked American deindustrialization with the sweatshop abuses in the CNMI. Jack Sheinkman, the president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, testified that the exploitation taking place on American soil destroyed the lives of workers in both the CNMI and the continental United States while allowing foreign investors to reap massive profits. Workers and academics testified that it was common for sweatshop operators to force women to work as prostitutes at night after they had finished sewing garments during the day.

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[48] Frank Swoboda," Firm Accused of Slave Labor Policy at Plant," *Washington Post,* 12 February 1992.

Women reported that they were coerced into having abortions in order to keep them productive.[49]

The purveyors of sweatshops testified that the highly-publicized abuses were an anomaly, and did not warrant any legislative action by Congress. Lorenzo De Leon Guerrero served as the third governor of CNMI from 1990 to 1994 after spending twenty years as an executive in the shipping industry. Throughout those years he had also served as a Republican leader in the CNMI legislature. During Guerrero's testimony, he said, "[My administration has] been pro business. We have been pro investment. We have worked hard to give assistance to our business people."[50] While acknowledging the labor abuses that took place under his watch, he said, "While most of our employers treat their workers fairly, and with respect, some do not." The abuses that took place in factories operated by the Tan Holdings Corporation were not isolated. The Tan family owned the majority of factories in Saipan and operated through at least six different corporations. Guerrero portrayed sweated labor as the result of a few greedy individuals, rather than a systematic problem that was the logical result of unrestrained global capitalism. Guerrero's attitudes were echoed by the business elite of the CNMI.

A representative of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce testified that of its 170 member companies, the overwhelming majority were "legitimate, law abiding and ethical employers." In response to the allegations of sweatshop labor, many

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[49] Congress, House, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs, *Northern Mariana Islands' Garment Industry: Oversight Hearing before the Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives,* 102 Cong., 2nd sess., July 30, 1992, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI, p. 43.
[50] Ibid., p. 115.

employers adopted a voluntary code of ethics to ensure decent conditions. The Chamber wished to see control of immigration and minimum wage left in local control to ensure "continued economic development." [51] By shrugging off concerns of sweatshop conditions as a "few bad apples," industry and its elected champions could continue to retain full autonomy, something they have sought throughout the 20th century.

A coalition of workers, activists, politicians, and lawyers fought for years for female workers' rights on American soil, on the CNMI. While many Americans had never heard of the CNMI, the scandal that played out in the media and in Congress demonstrated the long reach of American power brokers. According to the 1990 census, at least half the CNMI's population of 43,000 was "resident alien workers" from neighboring Asian countries, primarily China, the Philippines, and Korea. Those indigenous to CNMI retained American citizenship, and they routinely rejected the sweatshop positions, instead working for the local government. The need for a cheap, pliable labor force led investors to seek laborers abroad. Corporations recruited young women to sign two or three-year contracts to work in factories that were predominantly located in Saipan, the largest island of the CNMI. These workers were ineligible for U.S. citizenship and had access to few rights as temporary residents. Throughout the 1990s, Congress exempted the CNMI from most labor laws and granted duty-free status to manufactured goods in order to provide investor-friendly conditions and stimulate economic development. The system of recruiting the temporary workers was similar to that used by the El

[51] Ibid., p. 175.

Monte traffickers, with recruiters promising work with American wages in exchange for a four to six thousand dollar fee. However, in 1992, while workers in Saipan produced "an estimated $279 million dollars of wholesale clothing" in factories flying the American flag, they earned half of the U.S. minimum wage.[52]

Operators threatened deportation, withholding of wages, and violence if workers complained or attempted to organize. They worked and lived in dangerous, unsanitary, and inhumane conditions, with armed guards and barbed wire keeping them captive until they have earned the money to pay back their recruiters. Impossibly high quota systems forced workers to stay late for no pay. During their investigation, OSHA inspectors found "locked fire exits, overcrowded housing with no ventilation, exposed electrical wires, and gross lack of sanitation."[53] Other workers were completely exempt from the reduced minimum wage altogether, like the thousands of Filipino construction, domestic, and sex workers imported to boost the tourist industry catering to Japanese visitors. Some were abandoned when the work ran out, leaving them stranded with no work, money, lodging, or way to return home.

In 1995, it appeared that a bipartisan effort in Congress might take away that local control and enforce U.S. labor and immigration laws, the CNMI government hired Jack Abramoff's law firm Preston Gates to lobby on their behalf. From 1995 to 2001, they paid Preston Gates over six million dollars in order to retain exemptions

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[52] Philip Shenon, "Made in the U.S.A.? -- Hard Labor on a Pacific Island/A Special Report: Saipan Sweatshops Are No American Dream," *New York Times* 18 June 1993.
[53] Congress, House, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs, *Northern Mariana Islands' Garment Industry: Oversight Hearing before the Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, House of Representatives,* 102 Cong., 2nd sess., July 30, 1992, p. 43, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI.

from American labor and immigration standards, which they claimed would cost their economy eighty-five million dollars a year. Abramoff routinely appeared on media outlets to praise the CNMI business leaders for their diligence in preventing sweatshops. He flew dozens of members of Congress and their aides on "fact-finding" trips to meet local business leaders and tour a showcase factory against the backdrop of the islands' beautiful beaches. Visitors often brought their families for all-expenses paid trip to snorkel and golf, but they were kept away from the sweatshops, illegal abortion clinics, poverty, and crime. Abramoff touted the CNMI as a shining example of economic development without the American regulations to impede its success. The *Washington Times* called the CNMI a "laboratory of liberty" and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay described the commonwealth as a "perfect petri dish of capitalism." When accompanying Abramoff to Saipan with his family to celebrate New Year's Eve, DeLay said:

> When one of my closest and dearest friends, Jack Abramoff, your most able representative in Washington, D.C., invited me to the islands, I wanted to see firsthand the free-market success and the progress and reform you have made…In the case of the CNMI, liberals in Washington and the Clinton bureaucrats are intentionally trying to kill economic freedom and return the CNMI to the days of welfare dependency. Well I believe in the invisible hand of the marketplace, not the visible foot of the government.[54]

The close relationship between state officials in Saipan and Washington, D.C. with business elites, including the local Tan family and multi-national corporations like Levi Strauss and The GAP represented the same collusion of economic and political powers that was present in the American South during the 1920s.

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[54] DeLay made these statements at a benefit dinner for Willie Tan, the CEO of Tan Holding Corporation. See also Jeffrey Smith, "The DeLay-Abramoff Money Trail," *The Washington Post* 31 December 2005.

Beginning in 1995, a bipartisan collation introduced nearly thirty bills to strengthen the labor and immigration laws in the CNMI.[55] While the Senate voted unanimously to pass the wage and immigration reforms, Abramoff and DeLay made sure that they died in committees.[56] Global capitalism was undermining democracy. Since workers and their allies could not count on traditional means of reform, they used other institutions, including the justice system and the media. Workers and activists filed a series of lawsuits in 1999, which will be examined in the next chapter.

These suits brought important media coverage to the sweatshops in the CNMI, and activists used that attention to appeal to consumers. The media legitimized the campaign by referring to the factories as "sweatshops" and the organizers as "human rights activists." In April 1999, ABC's *20/20* aired a special investigation on the CNMI sweatshops, with reporter Connie Chung referring to the conditions as a "shameful violation of human rights on American soil."[57] The story described the forced prostitution, dangerous factories, and unsanitary food and

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[55] The coalition was comprised of Republican Senator Frank Murkowski, Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy, Democratic Representatives George Miller and David Bonier, and Republican Representative Bob Franks. Franks' bill was co-sponsored by a majority of members of the House of Representatives.

[56] After his release from prison, Abramoff released his memoirs, titled *Capitol Punishment: The Hard Truth About Washington Corruption From America's Most Notorious Lobbyist.* He details the high level of organization that went into maintaining a cheap, vulnerable labor source in the CNMI, writing, "The real benefit of the congressional trips was only apparent once the representatives and staff had returned. From the end of the first trip to the Marianas during Easter recess of 1996, we had a permanent cadre on Capitol Hill ready to stop any attacks on the CNMI. Whenever any representative or staff launched an anti-CNMI attack, one of the travelers would detect it early, inform us, and then usually take the lead in the counter assault." See Jack Abramoff, *Capitol Punishment: The Hard Truth About Washington Corruption From America's Most Notorious Lobbyist* (Washington, D.C. WND Books, 2011).

[57] Connie Chung and Charles Gibson, "The Shame of Saipan," *20/20*American Broadcasting Corporation, May 24, 1999, transcript, http://www.globalexchange.org/sweatfree/saipan/shame (last accessed August 11, 2012).

water that led to food poisoning. The reporters interviewed the current governor of the CNMI, who said that while he intended to "crack down *if* he found any sweatshops…[he] made a point not to visit them" (emphasis added). *20/20* referred to the worker and activist-initiated lawsuits and insinuated that corruption was at the heart of DeLay's decision to block legislation that would benefit sweatshop workers. DeLay, meanwhile, joked with reporters, saying, "I saw some of those factories. They were air conditioned. I didn't see anyone sweating." Several years later, in 2006, Jack Abramoff pled guilty to fraud and conspiracy and was sentenced to almost six years in prison, leading to and extensive corruption investigation. Four years after resigning from his position in Congress, Tom DeLay was sentenced to three years of prison for conspiracy and money laundering in 2010, due in part to his accepting bribes to ensure that the CNMI remained a haven for sweatshops.

In Defense of Sweatshops

Far Right think tanks and media outlets came to the aid of corporations' right to use sweated labor. The movement to shape culture and policy that was examined in Chapter 4 achieved enormous success as neoliberal thinkers established themselves as intellectuals in universities and scholarly work. *The Free Market*, the libertarian Ludwig von Mises Institute monthly newsletter, published an article about the Kathie Lee Gifford scandal. Economics professor William Anderson writes "'sweatshops' are the best thing that's happened to the third world in decades." Gifford and Wal-Mart were not exploiting children in Honduras; they were giving them the gift of a job. Anderson writes a story where workers have the freedom to seek employment wherever they like because they have the mobility to move from

factories with poor conditions. This language is similar to that of the early twentieth century's "liberty of contract," which claims to support workers' right to seek whatever employment they desired, but really served as the legal justification for employers to enforce sweatshop conditions.[58]

Conservative journalists explained that sweatshops were the best option for most foreign workers and that what seems like a small amount of money to spoiled Americans is extreme wealth to the young women who work in the sweatshops making clothing, textiles, toys, and electronics for Westerners. This was simply not true. Most earned somewhere between one-quarter and one-half of what they needed to afford basic nutrition, housing, heat, clothing, and transportation. Many left their children with family members, rarely able to visit. Manufacturers often locked workers inside of factories to ensure they do not take bathroom breaks or steal products.[59] The International Labour Organisation, the United Nations' agency "responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards," estimates that two million workers die from occupational diseases and accidents every year - a death toll averaging 5,000 a day.[60] This number has been on the rise due to increasing globalization erodes safety and health standards in the United States and prevents their implementation in the Global South.

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[58] William L. Anderson, "Kathie Lee's Children," *The Free Market* 14, No. 9 (September 1996).
[59] In 1993, this practice resulted in the world's worst industrial factory fire as 188 workers died in Thailand's Kader toy factory fire with another 500 suffering serious injuries. Drawing comparisons to New York's 1911 Triangle Fire, the victims of the Thai fire were mostly young women packed into building, which was devoid of fire alarms or extinguishers, sprinklers, or safe exits. They made toys for major corporations like Disney and Mattel. The only legal recognition of Kader Industrial's culpability was a fine of 520,000 baht, or $12,300. See "Thai Factory Fire's 200 Victims Were Locked Inside, Guards Say," *New York Times,* 12 May 1993.
[60] International Labour Organisation, "Safety and Health at Work," http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm (last accessed October 18, 2012).

Anderson neglected to include any mention of the sweatshop in New York manufacturing Kathie Lee Gifford's products. The fact that American employers have continued to exploit their workers with conditions extremely far outside of the standards prescribed by labor laws does not fit with their free market narrative. By insinuating that sweatshops were "growing pains" during a country's development, Anderson concealed the fact that even in the United States, the free market has been unable to squash labor exploitation. Additionally, suicides are common enough that electronics manufacturer Foxconn, who has contracts from multinational corporations like Apple, Sony, Nokia, Nintendo, and HP, installed suicide-prevention nets and required employees to sign no-suicide pledges in 2010.[61] This occurred fifteen years after the Right claimed that sweatshops would be a temporary problem for workers on their way to achieving the middle-class dream.

Neoliberal writers such as *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof bombarded Americans using the mainstream media as well as their own publications. They sought to frame the sweatshop as something that only occurred in the Global South and served as a stepping-stone for development. They claimed that factory workers in Honduras, Bangladesh, and Thailand were on the path to upward mobility, pointing to the United States as an example of a country that had once relied on sweatshops prior to the rise of the middle class. In 2000, Kristof wrote an article entitled "Two Cheers for Sweatshops," claiming:

> Sweatshops that seem brutal from the vantage point of an American sitting in his living room can appear tantalizing to a Thai laborer getting by on beetles. Fourteen years ago, we moved to Asia and began reporting there. Like most

[61] Andrew Malone and Richard Jones, "Revealed: Inside the Chinese Suicide Sweatshop where Workers Toil in 34-hour Shifts To Make Your iPod," *Daily Mail* 1 June 2010.

> Westerners, we arrived in the region outraged at sweatshops. In time, though, we came to accept the view supported by most Asians: that the campaign against sweatshops risks harming the very people it is intended to help. For beneath their grime, sweatshops are a clear sign of the industrial revolution that is beginning to reshape Asia.[62]

Both Anderson and Kristof critique activists fighting sweatshops, though neither does an adequate job of explaining their tactics. While merely pointing to boycotts as the primary tool, neoliberals mask the diversity of those fighting for worker justice. The NLC did not seek to force Wal-Mart and Kathie Lee out of Honduras; rather, the group fought for independent monitoring. USAS pressures universities to agree to independent monitoring. Sweatshop Watch fights against American sweatshops to win safe conditions, decent pay, and the end of sexual harassment for factory workers. When Kristof writes, "The simplest way to help the poorest Asians would be to buy more from sweatshops, not less," he conceals the real work that was being done and potential activism that could be done do to fight workers' exploitation.

Conclusion

While the political climate of the 1990s supported the maintenance and creation of sweatshop labor at home and abroad, it also created concerned consumers and activists. As both political parties worked to erode the safety net of New Deal and Great Society programs, new trade policies helped corporations to find and develop unregulated havens in sweatshops across the globe. Recognizing that the government's role in preventing sweatshops and improving working conditions had shifted over the last decades of the 20th century, activists began to

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[62] Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, "Two Cheers for Sweatshops," *New York Times* 24 September 2000.

utilize other institutions of power. When he stepped down from his cabinet position, Secretary of Labor Reich continued to advocate for greater separation between business interests and the state, having learned the hard way that voluntary codes had little impact on garment workers' conditions and lives. While his media-savvy tactics did little to change policy, they did provide a forum for dialog about sweatshops. Activists disagreed with Kristof's statement that the best way to help poor workers was simply to buy more. They used the publicity surrounding the Kathie Lee Gifford, El Monte, and Jack Abramoff scandals to shape the way that the public thought about corporate accountability and consumer responsibility. In my next chapter, I will examine the efforts of three different activist groups that fought to improve conditions for workers at home and abroad.

CHAPTER SIX

"It Doesn't Have To Be This Way!": Resisting Sweatshops in the Global Era

In 1995, Lora Jo Foo co-founded Sweatshop Watch and served as president through the late 1990s. She also worked as an attorney for the San Francisco-based Asian Law Caucus helping her clients win legal battles against employers who refused to pay their workers. Her earliest experiences shaped her passion for justice for female workers. Foo began working in a sweatshop in San Francisco's Chinatown at the age of eleven. With the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, after ten years of living apart, Foo's mother was able to emigrate from China to join her husband in California. After they separated, Foo's mother had few options but to find work in a sweatshop in order to support her six daughters. In spite of the economic prosperity enjoyed by millions of Americans in the post-war decades, she worked twelve-hour days in a garment factory, six or seven days a week. Foo writes, "We never saw much of Mom; the garment factory stole her from us."[1] The long hours and government assistance were not enough for the family to survive, and Foo "joined her older sisters at the factory, sewing 12 hours a day, six days a week during the summer and any time that I wasn't in school to help pay the rent and put food on the table."

After attending college at San Francisco State University, Foo wanted to use her education and experience to help improve conditions for workers. She returned to the factory for eight years as a seamstress and later worked as hotel housekeeper, helping to organize her co-workers in the International Ladies Garment Workers

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[1] Quoted in Randy Shaw, *Reclaiming America: Nike, Clean Air, & National Activism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 97.

Union and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union. Seeing the need for more labor lawyers, Foo graduated from law school in 1985 and has helped draft laws establishing liability for garment manufacturers who subcontract to sweatshops. Continuing her work as an anti-sweatshop activist, Foo says, "Whenever we can, we use different tactics to force employers to pay workers their hard-earned wages."[2] This commitment to a diversity of tactics became increasingly important as multinational corporations sought ever-higher profits by cutting productions costs through the creation of a globalized playing field where sweatshops could thrive. As part of the 1990s resurgence of anti-sweatshop activism, Foo fought exploitation on multiple fronts.

Sweatshops in San Francisco served as a local expression of an increasingly global marketplace. The steady stream of immigrant labor in the post-war era allowed unscrupulous manufacturers on the East and West Coasts to operate outside of both legally and socially accepted wages and conditions. As outlined in Chapter Five, corporate influence on government in the 1980s and 1990s served to dismantle regulatory standards to in order to achieve the greatest control over an increasingly vulnerable workforce.

However, the political, economic, and social culture of the last decade of the 20th century allowed anti-sweatshop activism to reenter the mainstream. In this chapter, I will show how activist groups of the 1990s resisted the economic "race to the bottom" as business interests searched to find the cheapest labor sources in the

[2] Sweatshop Watch, "About Sweatshop Watch," Garment Workers Calendar (1998), Lora Jo Foo Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA (hereafter referred to as Foo Papers).

world. The National Labor Committee, Sweatshop Watch, and United Students Against Sweatshops leveraged powerful institutions like media, justice system, and universities to challenge those who benefit from sweated labor. Each group adapted to the global era by highlighting injustices done to workers across regional and national borders.

National Labor Committee

In the early 1980, labor leaders, including the presidents of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the United Auto Workers, founded the National Labor Committee (NLC) to support pro-worker activists in Central America who were the targets of violence.[3] Under the leadership of Executive Director Charles Kernaghan, the NLC used media campaigns to target high profile apparel companies throughout the 1990s. Realizing that tabloid media publicize images of sweated labor connected to major brand labels, Kernaghan offered footage from cameras hidden in his glasses that he obtained when touring factories in Central America pretending to be a potential investor. Armed with the images of child and sweatshop labor and stories of young female garment workers forced to use risky long-term birth control shots, the NLC provided juicy stories to mainstream news outlets along with its message "It doesn't have to be this way."[4]

When the NLC formed in 1981, the organization focused on helping workers form unions in Central America. Organizers in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala were routinely tortured or murdered by right-wing paramilitaries and

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[3] In 2011, the NLC changed names to Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights.
[4] Ruth Abram, *A Coat of Many Colors: Immigration, Globalization, and Reform in New York City's Garment Industry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

authoritarian regimes. By 1980, death squads had murdered over 10,000 Salvadorans including many trade unionists, and the persecution increased as the decade continued. The NLC traveled to Central American to try to provide protection for activists and to publicize the violent struggles.

In the late 1980s, the NLC was comprised of two activists, Charles Kernaghan and Barbara Briggs, and operated on a miniscule budget. Kernaghan had received a Masters degree in Psychology from the New School in New York before traveling to El Salvador in the mid-1980s to photograph a peace march during the country's civil war. Briggs joined the NLC in 1989 after working in Central America as a researcher and translator for local unions. In the early 1990s, as the violence in Central America began to slow, the NLC shifted its mission to focus on sweatshop labor. The contacts that Briggs had made during her work as a translator helped the two activists write about poor working conditions and the role of American tax dollars in outsourcing jobs to sweatshops. In September 1992, the NLC released a report called *Paying to Lose Our Jobs* that accused the American government of spending one hundred million dollars in one year to develop and promote "free trade zones" for businesses looking to maximize their profits. The report included images of taxpayer-funded advertisements that read "Quality, industriousness and reliability is what El Salvador offers you. Rosa Martinez produced apparel for U.S. markets on her sewing machine in El Salvador. <u>You</u> can hire her for 57-cents an hour" and "Working to make your business work. 56 cents an hour is only one reason. The

Dominican Republic."[5] Additionally, the report included maps that illustrated the location of factory, mill, and plants closings throughout the United States, testimony from sweatshop workers, and a brief history and explanation of deindustrialization and globalization. The NLC released similar reports including, "Free Trade's Hidden Secrets," "The U.S. in Haiti," "Liz Claiborne / Sweatshop Production in El Salvador," "Wal-Mart's Shirts of Misery," and "Kathie Lee Sweatshop in El Salvador."

When corporations shift production to countries with low labor costs, they attempt to create a narrative of mutual benefit for both the shareholders and the workers who earn a fraction of the wages paid to Americans. However, they "justify economic systems that perpetuate a small minority of wealthy families and a large underclass ready to work for a pittance remuneration." [6] These corporations consciously or unconsciously supported authoritarian governments and military dictatorships that used violence and repression to ensure a stable and compliant workforce. For example, in 1980, paramilitary forces arrested over forty Guatemalan union activists and other factory workers.[7] The activists were never heard from again, and are presumed dead. This made brands vulnerable, and the NLC's brand-focused activism sought to soil the reputations of The GAP, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Liz Claiborne, Disney, Kohls, Hasbro, Reebok, Hanes, Ford, Target, Levi Strauss, Fruit of the Loom, the NBA, and the NFL, among others.

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[5] National Labor Committee, *Paying to Lose Our Jobs: A Special Report* (New York: National Labor Committee, 1992).
[6] Henry J. Frundt, *Trade Conditions and Labor Rights: U.S. Initiatives, Dominican and Central American Responses* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 3.
[7] Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003)

Rather than lobby for legislative change or try to organize workers, the group chose a tactic far more effective for a small organization. The NLC damaged brand reputations, which had become increasingly important and visible as corporations began to sell lifestyles to younger generations rather than specific products to baby-boomers in the 1980s. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the marketing of brands surpassed the manufacturing of goods in order for multinational corporations to become dominant. The brand became more important than producing high quality consumer goods so it became more important for companies like Nike to spend their efforts and money creating an image of athleticism, happiness, success, health, and celebrity rather than the quality of their goods.[8] Instead of targeting subcontractors, labor laws, and trade agreements, the NLC made the images of sweatshop labor palatable for a celebrity and brand-obsessed tabloid news by putting the brands and logos on trial. For example, when giving a lecture at a union hall in Ohio in 2003, Kernaghan held up a picture of a thirteen-year old sweatshop worker in Bangladesh, and said, "This is the real face of Wal-Mart. She only had two days off in the last four months. She's never ridden a bicycle. Seven cents an hour."[9] Like other 20th century anti-sweatshop activists, the NCL highlighted the realities of child and exploited labor. While corporations hoped to separate means of production from consumers and activists, the NCL brought them together.

It was the NLC's attention to Kathie Lee Gifford's clothing line for Wal-Mart that brought the organization into the American consciousness. Kernaghan, who became known as "the man who made Kathie Lee Cry," engaged in a media war with

[8] Klein, *No Logo.*
[9] Charles Bowden, "Keeper of the Fire," *Mother Jones* (July/August 2003).

her after one worker brought him a label bearing Gifford's on it. Briggs organized a worker tour for the media-friendly fifteen-year old Salvadoran sweatshop worker Wendy Diaz who manufactured clothes for Gifford's line. When speaking to the media and testifying to Congress, Diaz described the poor working conditions that included the standard low pay and seventy-hour workweeks as well as physical abuse at the hand of supervisors, tremendous heat, abused pregnant women, and locked bathrooms. Diaz, an orphan who began working in sweatshops at age thirteen, hoped to speak to Gifford to ask for her help in guaranteeing better conditions.[10] The highly publicized worker tour gave Americans a face that associated child labor and sweatshops with the Kathie Lee and Wal-Mart brands. Corporations that worked hard to keep consumers in the dark about the conditions in which workers produced goods had to adapt to the increased scrutiny that the NLC forced upon them.

The Kathie Lee sweatshop scandal resulted in both cultural and political changes. When Gifford apologized and agreed to independent monitoring of factories producing apparel for her line, Kernaghan publicly applauded her actions in the fashion industry trade journal *Women's Wear Daily*, saying "I don't want to take anything away from anything she's doing, but she got the message, and the action she's taking isn't going to be lost on other companies. This is going to be a real wake-up call for other apparel endorsers."[11] California Congressman George Miller organized a news conference with Wendy Diaz, Kernaghan, and religious

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[10] Steven Greenhouse, "Live with Kathie Lee and Apparel Workers," *New York Times*, 31 May 1996.
[11] Joana Ramey, "Kernaghan Cheers Gifford Move To Monitor Makers of Her Line," *Women's Wear Daily,* 23 May 1996.

clergy to urge American shoppers to hold corporations accountable for working conditions in factories that held their contracts. In a press release announcing the event, Miller said "the problem goes beyond Kathie Lee Gifford and Wal-Mart. Everyday American consumers unknowingly purchase products made with child and exploited labor. If consumers had more information, they may change their purchasing habits."[12]

Miller advocated a ban on the importation of products made by child labor and the creation of a national consumer label that would provide information about the workers who made products. Miller's proposals were not adopted, but they reflect tactics similar to that of the late 1930s Consumer Union reports that were discussed in Chapter 4. In April 1997, President Clinton created an anti-sweatshop taskforce made up of representatives from industry and human rights organizations. The taskforce designed and implemented a voluntary "No Sweatshop" code of conduct that provided few concrete changes for factory workers, but did force apparel giants to publicly voice their support for better working conditions.[13]

Kernaghan and Briggs demonstrated that an activist group need not be large to be effective. The NLC, which eventually expanded to a four-person organization,

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[12] "Rep. George Miller To Hold Press Conference with 15 Year Old Honduran Worker," George Miller press release, May 28, 1996. http://www.globallabourrights.org/press?id=0159 (last accessed October 12, 2012.

[13] One piece of the code was that workers who produce goods for American apparel and footwear companies must be paid the minimum wage in the country where the factories were located. Many sweatshops were located in countries with wages meant to entice foreign investment. In 1989, the United Nations released a study that found that 80% of Indonesian women who were paid the minimum wage were malnourished. See Tim Connor, "Clinton's New ''No Sweatshop'' Agreement," *Corp Watch*, 22 September 1997, http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=3032 (accessed September 15, 2012).

adapted to the shifting global marketplace. Not hampered by bureaucracy or other challenges faced by larger groups or government bodies, the NLC reacted to the needs of the Kathie Lee Gifford campaign. It used the media to achieve its goal of pressuring Gifford and the apparel industry, rather than the media using it to get a short sound bite. The *Chicago Tribune* praised Kernaghan, as the spokesperson for the NLC, writing, "If you've ever checked the tag on a polo shirt, wondering where it was made, and whether workers there are treated fairly, Charles Kernaghan has touched your life."[14] More importantly, Honduran sweatshop worker Lydda Gonzalez said of the group, "We could never have dreamed that we would find such warmth, interest and solidarity in the United States."[15] While the NLC highlighted the brutal realities of child and sweatshop labor with miserable conditions, poverty, and violence, its message is one of hope that American activists and consumers can fight against worker exploitation. Other organizations formed in the 1990s as a reaction to the culture shift that the NLC helped to create.

Sweatshop Watch

In the wake of the El Monte raid discussed in Chapter Five, Sweatshop Watch formed in 1995 as coalition of labor, student, religious, immigrant rights, and women's groups.[16] Sweatshop Watch's founders included a number of lawyers, including Lora Jo Foo, giving the group a important resource to fight for the implementation of existing labor laws and the creation of new reforms. With the

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[14] Stephen Franklin, "Charles Kernaghan: Labor Activist," *Chicago Tribune,* 6 February 2000.
[15] "Quotes on the Impact of the Institute," http://www.globallabourrights.org/ (accessed September 20, 2012.
[16] Members of Sweatshop Watch included the Asian Law Caucus, Common Threads, Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights, Jewish Labor Committee, Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, California Women's Law Center, La Raza Centro Legal, Los Angeles Commission on Women, Global Exchange, and UNITE!

slogan, "Empowering workers, informing consumers," the group became an important leader in the burgeoning fair trade movement as it urged consumers to purchase ethically-made goods. After securing the release of the Thai slaves from the detention center, the activist group pressured the retailers who had done business with the sweatshop to pay back wages to the workers. In addition to suing the operators who held them captive, the El Monte workers successfully filed multiple lawsuits against the retailers and manufacturers that that contracted the factory to produce garments, including BUM International, Fred Meyer, and Montgomery Ward. While denying that they knowingly contracted sweatshop labor, roughly a dozen corporations agreed to a four million dollar settlement after Sweatshop Watch organized letter-writing campaigns and public protests. Julie Su, the lawyer representing the workers and co-founder of Sweatshop Watch, said of the settlement, "In the struggle for corporate accountability, garment workers can fight back and win. It's no longer sufficient for retailers and manufacturers to say, 'We didn't know so we're not responsible.'"[17] During the trial, the group launched a Retailer Accountability Campaign that would hold companies like Jessica McClintock and Liz Claiborne responsible for using sweated labor.

Like many of the groups discussed in Chapters One and Three, Sweatshop Watch placed the experiences of workers at the center of their campaigns and engaged workers in the fight. Many of its members, like Lora Jo Foo, had worked in

[17] George White and Patrick McDonnell, "Sweatshop Workers to Get $2 Million," *Los Angeles Times,* 24 October 1997. See also K. Connie Kang, "Final $1.2 Million Added to Thai Workers' Settlement," *Los Angeles Times,* 29 July 1999.

sweatshops and really understand the need for better working conditions. According to its mission statement:

> Sweatshop Watch serves low-wage workers nationally and globally, with a focus on garment workers in California. We believe that workers should earn a living wage in a safe, decent work environment, and that those responsible for the exploitation of sweatshop workers must be held accountable. The workers who labor in sweatshops are our driving force. Our decisions, projects, and organizing efforts are informed by their voices, their needs, and their life experiences.[18]

Because the organization sought to impact grassroots action as well as state and national policies, they embraced a diversity of tactics that supported workers' autonomy and empowerment, such as picketing, popular education, and organizing ballot initiatives for stricter labor legislation.

Initially, the members of Oakland-based Sweatshop Watch primarily focused on fighting exploitation locally in their own communities. However, their quarterly newsletter and traveling photo exhibit titled "Faces Behind the Labels" provided public education of conditions and organizing taking place in global sweatshops. In 1996, Sweatshop Watch joined with other labor, religious, and women's organizations to gather signatures for a ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage in California. In November 1996, Californians voted to increase the minimum wage from $4.25 per hour to $5.75. In 1998, the group produced a Garment Workers Calendar with images of historical and modern sweatshops and dates of important resistance and activism.[19] Progressive Era activists pioneered the tactic of using images of child and exploited labor to appeal to consumers. Sweatshop Watch used modern technology to adapt its technique for the 1990s.

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[18] Sweatshop Watch, "About Sweatshop Watch," Garment Workers Calendar (1998), Foo Papers.
[19] Garment Workers Calendar (1998), Foo Papers.

In 1999, members of Sweatshop Watch, in conjunction with garment workers in Saipan, extended its focus overseas. Responding to the globalized sweatshop, Sweatshop Watch filed three class-action lawsuits on behalf of 30,000 workers against over forty retailers and factories. The suits charged employers with conspiracy to deny workers in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) their basic rights.[20] The allegations included extreme violations of U.S. labor laws and international human rights standards, such as indentured servitude. The lawsuits accused American-based retailers with conspiracy to deny up to 15,000 garment workers their human rights, including forcing the mostly female workforce to sign contracts taking away their freedom to date or get married.[21] Activists also filed a lawsuit against The GAP and other retailers with false advertising with the "Made in the USA" labels. The lawsuits were coordinated to happen at the same. Carmencita "Chie" Abad, a Filipino woman who produced clothes for The GAP in Saipan, traveled to Washington, D.C. to announce the lawsuits at a press conference. Like Wendy Diaz, who served as a symbol for child labor during the Kathie Lee Gifford scandal, Abad could provide a poignant reminder of the personal tragedy done in the name of low cost apparel. While several

[20] The US invaded the Mariana Islands during World War II and, after the war, administered them as a United Nations trust territory. In 1976, the islands became a commonwealth.

[21] The retailers charged in the suits included Abercrombie & Fitch, Brooks Brothers, Brylane L.P., Calvin Klein Inc., Cutter & Buck Inc., Donna Karan International, Dress Barn, Gap Inc. (Banana Republic, Old Navy), Gymboree Corp., J.C. Penney Company Inc., J. Crew Group Inc, Jones Apparel Group, Lane Bryant Inc., The Limited Inc., Liz Claiborne Inc., May Department Stores Company, Nordstrom Inc., Oshkosh B'Gosh Inc., Phillips-Van Heusen, Polo Ralph Lauren, Sears Roebuck and Company, Talbots Inc., Target Corp. (Target, Mervyn's, Marshall Fields, Dayton-Hudson), Tommy Hilfiger USA Inc., Warnaco Inc. and Woolrich, Inc. The lawsuit included the alleged estimated wholesale value of garments produced in Saipan and shipped to the U.S. during the last 4 years for the majority of companies. The estimate for the Gap, Inc. was $237.3 million.

corporations settled quickly, others used delay tactics in court to block the settlements.

Up against powerful lobbysists, politicians, and corporations, including Tom DeLay, Jack Abramoff, and The GAP, Sweatshop Watch organized actions that would highlight the exploitation taking place in the CNMI. Sweatshop Watch organized a speaking tour for former garment worker Chie Abad. At her stop in Milwaukee, Abad spoke to a Catholic group about her experiences as an indentured servant in Saipan, calling on them to demand a union label as safeguard against sweatshops.[22] Since a "Made in the USA" label did not deter sweatshop conditions, Abad, like the League of Women Shoppers, believed that a union was the most effective safeguard for workers. Activists also organized a series of low-risk actions, such as weekly "phone-ins" to the corporate offices, e-mail campaigns, and gathering signatures for petitions. After achieving minimal results, they escalated their tactics to apply greater pressure the retailers' vulnerable brand images.

One year into the lawsuit in January 2000, Sweatshop Watch helped to organize a direct action campaign at the San Francisco headquarters of The GAP, Inc. to pressure the corporation to meet with Abad, accept 10,000 signed petitions, and settle the lawsuit. When the CEO refused to meet any of their demands, they let a sit-in demonstration in the lobby chanting, "GAP workers have been wronged, One year is way too long" and "Settle the case or we'll be in your face." Police arrested fourteen activists, including Sweatshop Watch's Leila Salazar, who told the press "I am optimistic that our continued pressure on GAP Inc. will prove to be worthwhile

[22] Corissa Jansen, "Six Years in Saipan Sweatshop Still Wear on Former Worker," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* 6 November 2000.

by the end of this year."[23] In May 2000, twenty more were arrested demonstrating in front of The GAP Inc.-owned Old Navy.

Sweatshop Watch activists and allies utilized a number of tactics, both new and old. Sweatshop Watch and their member groups sent "action alerts" to thousands of consumers, encouraging them to get involved in different campaigns. One alert asked allies to mail, email, or fax letters to the chairman of Levi-Strauss. The letter singled them out for the company's unwillingness to settle, saying, "Levi's has an obligation to its customers and workers to stop the exploitation and attack of basic human rights occurring in the apparel industry, but currently Levi's stands alone in failing to end sweatshop abuse in Saipan." [24] The activists forced

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[23] Leila Salazar, "14 activists arrested at GAP Headquarters," e-mail alert to Global Exchange listserve, January 1, 2000.

[24] One campaign was a letter-writing blitz to Levi Strauss & Co, who refused to settle with the workers. Sweatshop Watch sent out the following action alert to their listserve with a sample letter and contact information for Levi's CEO. It was simple for consumers to copy and paste the letter into an e-mail, fax, or letter.

--SAMPLE LETTER--
FAX TO: Robert Haas, Levi's Chairman - (415) 501-7112 or
EMAIL: Robert Haas, rhaas@levi.com
EMAIL: Michael Koboriin in Levi's Social Responsibility Department
- mkobori@levi.com

Robert Haas, Chairman
Michael Korboriin
Levi-Strauss & Co.
1155 Battery Street
San Francisco, CA 94111
Dear Mr. Haas & Michael Korboriin:
As a Levi's customer, I want to express my concern about the sweatshop conditions and labor abuses on the island of Saipan. As a global company contracting in dozens of countries worldwide, Levi's has an obligation to its customers and its workers to reverse the race to the bottom in labor standards that is occurring in the apparel industry. In Saipan and across the globe, Levi's has a responsibility to lead the way towards ending labor and human rights abuses by taking steps to:

- Protect workers' rights, including the freedom of association and collective bargaining.
- Abolish the use of labor contracts that deny workers their basic human rights.
- Join the 26 other U.S. retailers in settling the sweatshop lawsuit with the garment workers of Saipan. Pay the workers what they are owed.

corporations to make a "decision dilemma" and determine whether they would rather settle with the workers or continue to have their brands associated with sweatshops, indentured servitude, forced abortions, and corrupt politicians.

In January 2004, the three lawsuits concluded with a twenty million dollar settlement with twenty-six American retailers and twenty-three Saipan factories. The deal included a code of conduct to be enforced by independent monitoring, payment of withheld wages, and repatriation of workers who want to return to their home countries. Nikki Bas, co-director of Sweatshop Watch, said, "This is a significant victory because it pushes the envelope on how far workers and consumers can press retailers to be responsible for the conditions under which their clothes are made."[25]

Meanwhile, Sweatshop Watch had continued to work with the 140,000 women, men and children in 5,000 sewing shops located in Los Angeles, the capital of the United States' garment industry. While the El Monte sweatshop kept Thai garment workers enslaved it also employed twenty-two Latino workers. In the aftermath of the raid, the Thai and Latino workers joined as plaintiffs in the litigation against the manufacturers and retailers. The collaboration between the Thai and Latino workers laid the groundwork for an organizing drive to unite sweatshop workers in Los Angeles across racial and ethnic lines. With the help of

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Levi's has an obligation to its customers and workers to stop the exploitation and attack of basic human rights occurring in the apparel industry, but currently Levi's stands alone in failing to end sweatshop abuse in Saipan.
Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing your response.
See Deirdre O'Boyle, "Action Alert! Help Us Pressure Levi's to Settle the Lawsuit!" e-mail alert to Sweatshop Watch listserve, March 1, 2003.

[25] Robert Collier and Jenny Strasburg, "Clothiers Fold on Sweatshop Lawsuit / Saipan Workers To Get Millions," *San Francisco Chronicle* 27 September 2002.

Sweatshop Watch, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, workers created a multi-ethnic garment worker center to fight against sweatshop conditions. Sweatshop Watch co-founder Julie Su argued that the worker center helps to build alliances across race and gender lines, saying:

> Asian and Latino workers often labor side by side; now they are also marching, protesting, going to court and standing up for their rights side by side. This unity shifts the balance of power from corporations to workers.[26]

Sweatshop Watch continued to organize against local and global worker exploitation into the 21st century from their Oakland office. They would become strong allies in building the student wing of the anti-sweatshop movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

United Students Against Sweetshops

In the late 1990s, students began organizing their campuses to protest the conditions under which their university apparel was made. The most prominent student organization, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) formed in 1998. Founded by a group of college students during a summer internship with the Union of Needle-trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) to organize a campus-based anti-sweatshop movement to work in concert with the union. When the interns returned to school in the fall, they began to coordinate campaigns to compel their administrators to adopt a code of conduct for all manufacturers who had licensing rights to produce university apparel. USAS knew that while its members had little power to directly confront Nike, Adidas, and Reebok, its members could

[26] "Asian and Latino Workers United in Los Angeles," *Sweatshop Watch* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2000).

pressure their universities to leverage multimillion dollar contracts to combat sweatshop labor. Each organization accessed powerful institutions that were not typically used to help workers creating an anti-sweatshop movement that influenced consumers, policies, and apparel contracts to benefit workers all over the world. As in the 1910s and 1930s, students in the 1990s played a significant role in the fight for worker justice using their resources and privileges to denounce exploitation. But while the NLC and Sweatshop Watch used the courts and public shaming campaigns, USAS targeted corporate vulnerability – their contracts with universities.[27]

By 2001, USAS had over chapter 200 chapters on college and university campuses. Members did not see themselves merely as campus activists; rather, they saw themselves as part of the Global Justice Movement. While the Kathie Lee Gifford scandal first introduced many Americans to modern sweatshop labor, students also discovered anti-sweatshop activism through Sweatshop Watch's campaign against exploitation in the CNMI. The popular rock band Rage against the Machine and other celebrities worked with UNITE in a public relations campaign against sweatshops, making activism cool to a generation of teenagers. They wrote letters to CEOs, boycotted specific brands, and attended protests and rallies at shopping malls. Others learned about the student contingent of the ant-sweatshop movement in November 1999 in Seattle.[28]

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[27] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing minority of college students had been mobilized around justice issues, such as apartheid, homelessness and hunger, the environment, and racial, gender, and sexual equality. See Paul Rogat Loeb, *Generation at the Crossroads: Apathy and Action on the American Campus* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
[28] Iris Young, "From Guilt to Solidarity," *Dissent Magazine* (Spring 2003), pp. 39-45.

A few participated in, and many were inspired by, the 1999 massive protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) that took place in Seattle. Importantly, the Seattle protests forced national media outlets to report on anti-globalization activism (and prompting why anyone would protest the WTO). The WTO is self-defined as, "the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. At its heart are the WTO agreements, negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world's trading nations and ratified in their parliaments. The goal is to help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers conduct their business."[29] While the WTO works hard to maximize profits of corporations, it does so at the expense of local communities, workers, and the environment. Many groups, including churches, unions, indigenous communities, students, feminists, environmentalists, and anarchists, have criticized the WTO's undemocratic structure and its role in widening the wealth gap between the rich and the poor.[30]

During the 1999 WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, these same groups worked together to shut down the trade delegates' meetings. Groups of activists formed coalitions, like the Direct Action Network, and organized massive non-violent direct actions, such as blockades in Seattle's busiest intersections. After months of preparations, including trainings, workshops, conference calls and the establishment of common principles, protesters were able to form united and sustained blockade capable of preventing the opening ceremonies.[31] The diversity

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[29] http://www.wto.org/

[30] *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era,* ed. Benjamin Heim Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (New York: Verso, 2002).

[31] Starhawk, "How We Shut Down the WTO," *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era,* ed. Benjamin Heim Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 52.

of organizations and activists represented in Seattle resembled the 1930s Popular Front, in which a variety of liberals and radicals worked on common goals without sacrificing individual ideologies.

Seattle also proved to be a recruiting ground for the anti-sweatshop movement. Sweatshop Watch distributed flyers to college-aged protestors urging them to join USAS. The flyers documented sit-ins and rallies that began on college campuses earlier in the year as well as suggestions for organizing students on their own campuses. Sweatshop Watch member organization Global Exchange produced a twenty-three minute documentary entitled *Sweating for a T-Shirt* that traced University of California-Los Angeles student Arlen Benjamin's quest to uncover the true costs of a shirt sold at the campus bookstore. Benjamin traveled to Honduras to meet with workers, factory owners, union organizers, and human rights activists and then spoke with students at UCLA and Brown University about the ways that they could use their role as student-consumers to act in solidarity with exploited workers.[32] Student activists left the Seattle protests with a guide for organizing their campuses upon their return.[33] Seattle inspired and influenced grassroots activists all over the world, and shaped the way that groups like United Students Against Sweatshops developed their campaigns.

USAS had a decentralized structure and gave each chapter the freedom to adapt tactics based on what they thought would be most effective. For example, some USAS organizers engaged in direct action such as sit-ins in while others

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[32] Global Exchange, *Sweating for a T-Shirt* (1998).
[33] Sweatshop Watch, Student Organizing flyer (1999), WTO Seattle Collection, #5177-3, Box 14, Folder 4, WTO History Project University of Washington Special Collections Library, Seattle, WA.

worked through the university bureaucracy by joining their student government and pushing policy changes.[34] USAS used the power derived from its members' university connections to pressure corporations like Nike, Adidas, and Russell. Colleges and universities license their names and logos to clothing brands that contract the orders to companies that subcontract to factories all over the world. While students typically did not have the ability to travel overseas to march against sweatshops in the Global South, they could demonstrate on campus how sweatshop-made apparel compromised their universities' mission.

Students at Duke sought to work with administrators about adopting a formal code of conduct that would guarantee the companies that manufactured the university apparel and merchandise would uphold workers' rights. When the administration at Duke refused to meet with students, USAS organized an e-mail petition with hundreds of students demanding a dialog. In response, administrators agreed to meet and a code of conduct for Duke's licensees was developed, making Duke the first university to adopt such a policy. Rather than fight their students, school officials took advantage of the positive publicity, saying, "We are doing it because it's the right thing to do. We cannot tolerate having the sweat and tears of abused and exploited workers mixed with the fabric of the products which bear our marks.''[35] However, a rumor circulated over the summer that administrators were planning to weaken the code. In January 1999, over twenty members of Duke USAS

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[34] Liza Featherstone, *Students against Sweatshops: The Making of a Movement* (New York: Verso, 2002).
[35] Steven Greenhouse, "Duke to Adopt a Code to Prevent Apparel From Being Made in Sweatshops," *New York Times,* 8 March 1998.

staged a sit-in within the president's office lobby, and thirty hours later the administration agreed to keep the original code.

Many universities sought to appease their students by joining the Fair Labor Association (FLA). The FLA was the successor to DOL Secretary Reich's Fashion Industry Forum and was comprised of corporations, universities, non-profit agencies, and factory operators. USAS and other activist groups denounced the FLA as a corrupt organization controlled by industry representatives who saw sweatshops not as problem of exploitation, but as a public relations issue. While originally a member of the FLA, UNITE quit the governing board in protest of their policy to "self-monitor." Explaining the conflict of interest in a group controlled by corporate interests certifying goods as "sweat-free," one member of USAS said, "It's like McDonald's nutritionists boasting about how healthy a Big Mac is."[36]

Instead of supporting the FLA, USAS worked with university administrators, unions, workers, and other organizations, including Sweatshop Watch, to found the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), an alternative monitoring system that was completely independent of corporate influence. Key to its mission was the assertion that "workers from the Global South will be important in the formation of the WRC."[37] At the time of its founding, the WRC had the support of forty-four universities.[38] The independent nature of the WRC was meant to be a safeguard against corrupt inspectors and monitors.

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[36] United Students Against Sweatshops, "What's Wrong with the FLA?" http://usas.org/campaigns-old/sweat-free-campus/dont-pay-the-fla/about-the-fla/ Accessed August 14, 2012.
[37] United Students Against Sweatshops, "Minutes from the Worker Rights Consortium Founding Conference" (April 2000) http://www.workersrights.org/ Accessed August 14, 2012.
[38] As of 2012, the WRC had over 180 college and university affiliate members.

Activists on different campuses utilized a variety of tactics to pressure their universities to join the WRC. In April 1999, the University of Arizona (UA) chapter of USAS demanded its school's immediate withdrawal from the problematic FLA in favor of the WRC. Over one hundred students marched to the president's office. The marchers were not simply carrying signs and chanting slogans; rather, organizers had planned a carnival-like atmosphere complete with skits, campus mascots, and performance artists. USAS presented the president with a petition with over 1,000 student signatures opposing UA's participation in the FLA, and over sixty students staged a sit-in outside of the president's office that continued for almost ten days. The administration agreed to the majority of the students' demands, though they eventually refused to withdraw from the FLA. In response to the administration's foot-dragging, a USAS member wrote an editorial for the school paper, saying "[it] may seem silly, absurd, even obnoxious, but if Students Against Sweatshops ever hopes to accomplish its goals, there is no other way but to continue holding rallies, sit-ins, marches and fasts."[39]

Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) pressured their administration to join the WRC as well. UW made over one million dollars each year by selling clothing bearing their logo, some of which was produced in sweatshop factories in the US and overseas. In February 1999, seven members of the UW chapter of USAS entered the chancellor's office to demand the university's withdrawal from the FLA and membership in the WRC. When other students and supporters attempted to enter the building as well, they were greeted with violence

[39] Moniqua Lane, "Necessary Absurdity," *Arizona Daily Wildcat,* 22 February 2000.

and pepper spray, prompting the seven in the office to engage in a "hard" occupation, chaining their bodies together with bike locks. Others joined the sit-in, which lasted for four days until police arrested over fifty students at four o'clock in the morning, ensuring little media coverage of the unpleasant scene full of tear gas and riot gear. Thousands of supporters rallied in solidarity of those arrested and raised over $20,000 for bail money.[40] The UW-Milwaukee student government passed a "UW solidarity act," and the campus newspaper issued a special four-page report to educate students in Milwaukee about the occupation. Madison city officials showed their support by pledging, "not [to] grant approval to university projects in his district" until charges against the students were dropped. In March 1999, all criminal charges were dropped and each student received a fifty-dollar ordinance violation, roughly equivalent to a parking ticket.[41]

Nike, one of the major forces in the university apparel industry, did all it could to ensure that universities would not submit to USAS's pressure. CEO Phil Knight, an alumnus of the University of Oregon (UO), cancelled a planned thirty million dollar donation to UO when the school joined the WRC. He also severed a contract to provide athletic equipment to Brown University and walked away from negotiations to renew a licensing contact with the University of Michigan (UM). Nike said UM was no longer a "compatible partner" since its WRC membership

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[40] The sit-in had received international media coverage and support from all over the world, including Canada, Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

[41] When it became clear the chancellor would not honor his commitment to sever ties with the FLA, Sarah Turner, a UW USAS member who was arrested in the 2000 sit-in, wrote that despite the university's membership in the FLA, "Madison students still don't know whether UW-Madison's sweatshirts and other apparel are made under safe working conditions or whether they are still made in sweatshops." See Sarah Turner, "UW's Sweatshop Stance Defies University's Goals, " *The Daily Cardinal*, 28 November 2001.

made Nike subject to the school's labor code and WRC monitoring. The UM president accused Nike of retaliating against the school for making "very moderate and prudent efforts to ensure that their products are made consistent with well-accepted standards of international human rights." Later, when the Oregon administration decided not to continue their membership with the WRC, Knight not only reinstated his thirty million dollar donation, he added an extra twenty million.

Perhaps USAS's greatest achievement was their 2009 campaign against Russell Athletics. When a Honduran factory that produced clothes for Russell closed after workers voted to unionize, an anti-sweatshop coalition organized a campaign to demand that Russell reopen and recognize the workers' rights. USAS played a major role in convincing over ninety universities to end or postpone their multi-million dollar contracts with Russell, which gave Russell licensing rights to use the universities' brands.[42] Additionally, students picketed NBA playoff games and used social media to encourage consumers to boycott Russell. When national media outlets almost completely neglected to report on the boycott and pickets, USAS began to use social media networks, like Twitter, to spread the word. The use of digital technology allowed protests to attract attention from all over the world. They created a situation where it was too costly for Russell not to reopen the factory and honor workers' freedom of association. This victory marked a decade of students pressuring university officials and corporations to implement codes of conduct to protect workers' rights.

Conclusion

[42] Steven Greenhouse, "Labor Fight Ends in Win for Students, *New York Times*, 17 November 2009.

The 1990s marked the reemergence of a massive anti-sweatshop movement. Like the 1910s and 1930s, activists demonstrated their solidarity with workers by using their privilege to highlight unethical labor conditions and agitate for increased standards. By the end of the decade, over forty American organizations had formed to fight worker exploitation using different strategies and tactics. Many of them continue to fight for small gains, justice for workers, and accountability for corporations. The National Labor Committee has remained relevant and savvy, and in 2011, investigated the infamous reality television Kardashian family's clothing line and publicly asked the Kardashians not to profit of off "slave labor." Kathie Lee Gifford readily offered the family advice, even suggesting that they visit the factories. Sweatshop Watch disbanded in 2009, but many of its coalition members continue to write pro-worker legislation and provide legal services for sweatshop workers. In 2012, USAS had over 250 chapters all over the country and had expanded its efforts to include farmworker solidarity, campus worker justice campaigns, and participation in the Occupy movement.

CONCLUSION

Activists have continued to demonstrate their solidarity with sweated workers into the 21st century. While finishing my dissertation, an example of the unrelenting struggle between labor and industry emerged in my own community. This ongoing labor dispute provides an important model of cross-class alliances. In June 2012, factory workers at Milwaukee's Palermo's Pizza, the largest U.S. manufacturer of private pizza labels, went on strike when the company refused to recognize their union.[1] Workers believed that a union would offer them greater protection against the company's negligence to health and safety concerns, which had led to injuries, including lacerations and severed fingers. Since 2010, Palermo's Pizza had been fined $7,000 by OSHA for violating safety regulations. After workers sought union recognition, the company retaliated, using workers' immigration statuses as a pretext to fire over seventy union members. The workers, who were mostly Latina, organized picket lines, set up a strike relief fund, and conducted outreach with the Milwaukee-based immigrant rights group Voces de la Frontera. In ninety-degree heat, striking workers, their families, and allies marched outside the Milwaukee, Wisconsin factory chanting, "No justice, no pizza," "All good workers boycott Palermo's," and "*Sí Se Puede*" (Yes, it can be done).

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[1] In addition to selling pizzas through the Palermo's brand, its private label distribution allows the company to supply frozen pizzas to grocery stores, which then sell the pizzas under the store brand. For example, Palermo's supplies pizzas to Costco Wholesale, who in turn sell them under their Kirkland Signature brand. Additionally, Palermo's is an official sponsor for the following athletic teams, Milwaukee Bucks, Milwaukee Brewers, Iowa Hawkeyes, Wisconsin Badgers, Marquette Golden Eagles, Minnesota Twins, Milwaukee Admirals, Chicago Bears, Milwaukee Bucks, Milwaukee Wave, and Kansas City Chiefs. Palermo's Pizza Sponsorships, http://www.palermospizza.com/sponsorships.aspx (accessed November 8, 2012).

One year earlier, hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin teachers, students, farmers, retirees, fire fighters, nurses, and other public employees converged on Madison to protest Governor Scott Walker's anti-worker, anti-education agenda. The "Wisconsin Uprising" was a grassroots movement that opposed Walker's "budget-repair" bill, which proposed to slash funding to public schools and strip public employees of their collective bargaining rights. Led by University of Wisconsin graduate teaching assistants, the marches in Madison grew steadily throughout February 2011 with protestors occupying the capital and marching in the streets for several weeks. State Democratic leadership urged a recall campaign to shift momentum away from direct action. After an unsuccessful attempt to recall Walker in the summer of 2012, however, activists were left without a logical next step. Though not a statewide solution, the Palermo's strike provided an opportunity for allies to support workers and organized labor.

Students from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee organized a Facebook group called "Support Striking Palermo's Workers" and posted pictures from the daily pickets along with requests for allies to help. At the time of this writing, over 1,700 Facebook users indicated that they "liked" the group. By using social media, students could provide information quickly to allies tailoring their requests to reflect workers' changing needs. Like the League of Women Shoppers, the Milwaukee students wrote about the "facts" of the labor dispute and suggested actions that readers could take. However, the digitized technologies that they used allowed them to reach their audience more quickly and efficiently than their predecessors

One Saturday during the first month of the strike, dozens of Catholic nuns joined workers on the picket line. The nuns were on a nationwide bus tour in opposition to a federal austerity bill proposed by Wisconsin Congressman, and Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Paul Ryan. Sister Diane Donoghue said, "One of the basic, basic, teachings of Catholic social justice is the right to organize."[2] Nuns have long played a role in highlighting economic and racial injustices and continue to serve as a moral authority, particularly in a heavily Catholic city like Milwaukee. The visit from the nuns also served as an important reminder of the connections between Ryan's austerity bill, Governor Walker's anti-union legislation, and the labor dispute at Palermo's. Management at Palermo's was part of a broader 21st century trend to eliminate the gains made by American workers over the past century.

Several local businesses rejected that trend and offered their support to the striking workers. On June 8, Milwaukee's Riverwest Co-Op issued a statement promising not to reorder Palermo's Pizzas until the campaign honored the workers' union. Outpost Natural Foods, a Milwaukee-based cooperatively-owned grocery store with close to 17,000 members, displayed signs in their frozen food section indicating that Palermo's was in the middle of a labor dispute. In Outpost's letter to its members, the board wrote that while they would not participate in a boycott, they would:

> Post information about the issue and allow our owners and shoppers to make educated choices about the foods they purchase and vote with their

[2] "'Nuns On The Bus' stop at Palermo's Pizza Plant," CBS News, 20 June 2012, http://www.cbs58.com/news/local-news/Nuns-On-The-Bus-stop-at-Palermos-Pizza-Plant-159795525.html?m=y&smobile=y (last accessed October 22, 2012).

> dollars. An educated ownership makes their own informed decisions about the foods they eat.[3]

Outpost also reminded its members that it was a union shop and supported workers' rights to organized labor. Like President Clinton's Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich, Outpost believed that educated consumers would make ethical decisions about supporting the products of sweated or exploited labor. Reich hoped that market pressure from shoppers would influence retailers and manufacturers to improve their labor standards.

In July 2012, the strikers and their allies escalated their tactics. With management refusing to bargain, the union and the AFL-CIO formally endorsed a boycott of Palermo's products. To show its support, the Milwaukee-based café and grocery store Beans and Barley promised not to reorder pizza from Palermo's until the strike was over. Its customers thanked the locally-owned business by posting on its Facebook wall with comments like, "Thank you, Beans & Barley, for your solidarity with the Palermo workers," "Gracias por la solidaridad con los trabajadores en huelga de Palermos!!!! Thanks for supporting the workers on strike at Palermos!!!!! YOU ROCK!!!! :)," and "THANK YOU for your Palermo support. It is the RIGHT thing to do."[4] While the support of these local businesses encouraged workers and allies, the financial impact was minimal.

In order to pressure Palermo's, the growing coalition of striking workers their allies needed more retailers to sever their pizza contracts. The factory's close

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[3] Outpost Natural Foods, "Outpost information regarding Palermo's Pizza boycott," (July 2012)http://www.outpost.coop/resources/issues/petitions_boycotts_.php (accessed October 12, 2012).

[4] Beans and Barley (August 2012) https://www.facebook.com/pages/Beans-Barley/40445424973 (accessed on September 10, 2012).

proximity to the Milwaukee Brewer's baseball stadium allowed picketers to reach fans on their way to games, which was significant since the stadium sold the company's pizzas. Activists hoped to sully Palermo's as a brand like activists in the 1990s had done with The GAP, Kathie Lee Gifford's line for Wal-Mart, and Nike. Groups like the National Labor Committee were so successful that in 1998, Nike founder and CEO Phil Knight admitted, "[Our] product has become synonymous with slave wages, forced overtime, and arbitrary abuse."[5] Using strategies perfected in the 1990s, 21st century activists hoped to hold corporations accountable for the conditions in which their goods were produced.

As the Palermo's strike wore on, activist groups around the country began to join the workers' campaign. Workers and allies organized pickets targeting Costco, the country's largest retailer of Palermo's products. Costco had a Supplier Code of Conduct that required its vendors to respect workers' rights to assemble. However, codes mean little without enforcement, as Kathie Lee Gifford learned in the mid-1990s. The demand for independent monitoring of factory codes and other labor laws has been an unfortunate constant throughout the many struggles outlined in this study.

To force Costco's hand, members of United Students against Sweatshops from the University of Washington visited the company's national headquarters to urge its CEO to drop the its contract with Palermo's. When he refused to meet with them, students and community members picketed the building, carrying signs that read, "We don't want no sweatshop pizza" and "Take a bite out of injustice."

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[5] John H. Cushman Jr., "New York Times: Nike Pledges to End Child Labor And Apply U.S. Rules Abroad," *New York Times,* 13 May 1998.

Organizers also encouraged consumers to print letters of support from the strike website and take them to Costco. With solidarity actions taking place all over the country, national media sources began to cover the strike.[6] Though the dispute remains unresolved at the time of this writing, continued financial pressure from consumer-driven solidarity activism eventually forced the CEO of Palermo's to meet with union leaders and respond to media queries. Palermo's management and local elected officials from both political parties have denounced the strike and called the company an important "job creator."[7]

Corporate leaders responding to social justice campaigns often argue that they keep prices low due to American consumers' demands. Studies indicate that consumers have a very different understanding of their role as purchasers, however. In the mid-1990s, Marymount University's Center for Ethical Concerns commissioned a series of surveys to determine how American consumers felt about sweatshops. Conducted in 1995, 1998, and 1999, the National Consumer Sweatshop Surveys consistently reflected Americans' desire to support ethically produced goods. They revealed that two-thirds of consumers would avoid shopping at a retailer that they knew sold garments made in sweatshops. Additionally, eighty-six percent would pay more money for their clothing if they knew that the workers who made it enjoyed good living and working conditions. The surveys also indicated that

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[6] Steven Greenhouse and Steven Yaccino, "Fight over Immigrant Firings," *New York Times*, 27 July 2012; Josh Eidelson, "Union: Fair Election Impossible Following Mass Firings by Pizza Company," *In These Times,* 1 August 2012.

[7] Chris Abele, "More Light, Less Heat On Palermo," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel,* 11 July 2012; Georgia Pabst, "Calls for Palermo Boycott Bad for City, Donovan Claims," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, 6 September 2012.

consumer concern was high among all income levels. Over half of those surveyed said that a "fair-labor label" would provide the greatest aid in helping them make their purchasing decisions.

Anti-sweatshop activists throughout the 20th century contributed to the sentiments reflected in these surveys. In 1929, the *Miami News* reminded its readers that Christmas shopping had contributed to miserable conditions for workers prior to the NCL's "shop early" campaign.[8] After thirty years, the organization had successfully shifted the way that Americans conducted their holiday purchasing. The activists of the 1910s, 1930s, and 1990s believed that middle-class and elite consumers were responsible for, and capable of, "using [their] buying power for justice." By making well-informed and ethical purchasing decisions, mainstream shoppers helped broader justice movements achieve reforms for better working conditions.

Groups like the Women's Trade Union League, the League of Women Shoppers, and Sweatshop Watch provide important lessons and tools for 21st century activists and scholars. The allies supporting Palermo's workers draw from a century-old American tradition of anti-sweatshop, pro-justice activism. In the short term, it is unlikely that the struggle against sweatshops and oppression will with living wages and safe conditions for all workers around the world, but it is essential that activists continue to engage in what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the "beautiful struggle."[9] Members of the groups examined in this dissertation worked

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[8] Julia Blanshard, "Consumers' League Works To Protect Children," *Miami News,* 18 November 1929.
[9] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam*, speech presented at Riverside Church, New York, 4 April 1967.

to create better lives for themselves and for others as they carried out their belief that a victory for one is a victory for all. In the 1990s, USAS adopted a motto from an aboriginal Australian activist describing a form of solidarity that attempts to dismantle multiple forms of hierarchy and oppression. It reads, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."[10] Activists must remain vigilant, creative, adaptable, and aware of their history in order to challenge the minority view that profits are more important that people. And to do this, we much work together. Solidarity is not a matter of charity or altruism; rather, solidarity is a march toward collective empowerment and liberation."

[10] This quote is often attributed to Aboriginal activist Lilla Watson, though she prefers its citation to read "Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s."

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------ *The CIO, 1935-1955*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

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EDUCATION

• M.A., University of Alabama, Women's Studies (May 2006)
Thesis: "'Workingwomen, Unite': Women Textile Workers in the Deep South, 1900 to 1940"
• B.S., Texas Tech University, Human Development and Family Studies (December 2003)

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Lecturer, Women's Studies, UW-Milwaukee 2011-present
Introduction to Women's Studies
Multicultural America
Graduate Teaching Assistant, History, UW-Milwaukee 2006-2010
American History, 1877-present
American Women's History
Historical Roots of Contemporary Issues: The Great Depression
History of Race, Science, and Medicine
Family and Sex Roles of the Past
Lecturer, Social Sciences, College of Lake County, Grayslake, IL 2009
American History, 1877-present
Graduate Instructor, Women's Studies, University of Alabama 2005-2006
Introduction to Women's Studies

AREAS OF SPECIALTY

American Women's History
Working Class and Labor Studies
20th Century Social Movements and Activism

PUBLICATIONS

• "How did the League of Women Shoppers Use Their Privilege To Act in Solidarity with Workers?" forthcoming in *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000* (Alexander Street Press).
• "Racialized Sexuality," entry for *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, *2nd Edition.*
• "Rape," entry for *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, *2nd Edition.*

CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

"Using Their Buying Power for Justice: Solidarity Activism in the South, 1935-1945," Southern Association for Women Historians Annual Conference, Texas Christian University, June 2012.

"Shopping with a Conscience: Women Organize Consumers against American Sweatshops, 1910-1940," Midwest Labor and Working Class History Conference, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, February 2012.

"Fighting for a Sweat-Free Campus: Students Take on Global Capitalism," Northern Illinois Graduate Student Conference, Northern Illinois University, October 2011.

"A Victory for One Is a Victory for All: The Role of Solidarity Work in Anti-Sweat Shop Campaigns," Mid-America Conference on History, Oklahoma State University, September 2011.

"Solidarity in Action: Movements to End Sweatshops in the 20th Century," Midwest World History Association Conference, Alverno College, September 2011.

"Eight Hours for What We Will: Reformers, Immigrants, and Assimilation," Loyola University Chicago History Graduate Student Conference, Loyola University, April 2008.

"The Milwaukee YWCA: Americanization through Hairstyles, Recipes, and Charm School." History Graduate Student Association Conference in Cultural History, Indiana University, March 2008.

"'Which Side Are You On?' Solidarity between Southern Textile Women," Southeastern Women's Studies Association Conference, Valdosta State University, April 2006.

AWARDS

• Recipient of UWM History Department Research Travel Award (2011)
• Recipient of UWM Chancellor's Graduate Student Award (2006-2007)
• Recipient of University of Alabama Elizabeth Meese Award in Feminist Research (2006)

SERVICE

• Volunteer at Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting (2012)
• Member of Organizing Committee for the Midwest Labor and Working Class History Conference, Milwaukee, WI (2012)
• Judge, National History Day – Milwaukee, WI (2007-2012)
• Graduate Representative, UWM History Department Graduate Affairs Committee (2009-2010)
• University Liaison, UWM Alliance of History Graduate Students (2008-2009)
• Secretary, Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association, AFT local 2169 (2008-2009)

OTHER RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

• AmeriCorps*VISTA through Wisconsin Campus Compact (2010-2011)
• Moderator, "Transforming the Jericho Road: Continuing the Struggle for Social Justice in the 21st Century" Panel Discussion, UWM, February 2011.
• Introductory Speaker, "Another University is Possible" Panel Discussion, UWM, September 2010.
• UWM Women's Resource Center Project Intern (2010)

• Introductory Speaker, "'Men Need Not Apply': An Evening with Julie Willett," UWM, November 2009.
• Coordinator for UWM campus lectures by the Guerrilla Girls, Jessica Valenti, and Julie Willett (2009-2011)
• Interviewed by Wisconsin Public Radio, "UW-M Students Denounce Sweatshop-Made University Clothes," October 2008.
• New College Radio Lab Panel Discussion on "Feminist Thought in the 21st Century," University of Alabama, April 2006.