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# The Progressive Shirtwaist Working Women of New York in the Fight for Structural Changes in Society

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## Abstract

Triangle Shirtwaist Company of New York has been best remembered for its fire of 1911 because as many as 146 people, mostly newly-arrived female immigrants, died in a space of eighteen minutes and also because it later forced the fundamental reforms in politics and industry. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a leading presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, chose the site in September 2019 to hold her largest rally to date as a reminder that it was working people who paid the price when the corrupt politicians ignored the safety of workers.

What makes the Triangle fire especially tragic is that many of the victims had already called attention to the dangerous working place as well as the corruption between politics and industry during the general strike of garment workers of 1909, "Uprising of the Twenty-thousand," which started at the Triangle. It was the largest strike by women, mostly Russian Jewish women, and lasted for more than ten weeks. The strike influenced both the garment workers outside of New York and workers of other trades. The fire in part resulted from the defeat of the Triangle strikers, as aptly described, "The strike that started at Triangle was not won at Triangle." If the Triangle employers had accepted some of their demands, the tragedy might have been avoided.

At the 110$^{th}$ anniversary of the strike, it might be worthwhile to pay tribute in Japan, where the story is less well-known, to those garment workers who strove to make structural changes in society where people were divided between newly-arrived immigrants and the native-born, between the haves and the have-nots, just as we see today. One of the lessons New Yorkers learned from the strike of immigrants was that the improvement of their condition must be the improvement for all in the city.

## 1. Introduction

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a leading presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, had a good reason for choosing to hold her largest rally to date in New York City's Washington Square Park in September 2019. She urged the crowd to join her in making structural changes in American democracy, just as the victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire of 1911 forced the federal and state governments to improve working conditions. Explaining that it was the working people who paid the price when corrupt politicians ignored the safety of workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, Sen. Warren asked if this sounded familiar to us now. She continued that Americans confront such problems as climate change, guns, and health care because "giant corporations bought off our government."[1]

She was right that the fire, which killed 129 women and 17 men in a space of eighteen minutes, had a profound impact on building codes, labor laws, and politics, including the New Deal, by changing the mindset of many politicians and employers. One of the witnesses of the fire, Frances Perkins, became the investigator for the Factory Investigating Committee of the fire and was later appointed as the first female cabinet member as secretary of labor under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and fought for workplace safety.[2] Perkins collaborated with Sen. Robert Wagner to pass the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standard Act because of the fire.

The fire was a tragedy itself, but what makes the Triangle fire especially tragic is that many of the victims had already called attention to the dangerous working places during a general strike of garment workers in 1909, "The Uprising of the Twenty-thousand." The Triangle fire resulted in part from the defeat of the Triangle strikers: in addition to their failure to gain demands, such as the union recognition, fire escapes, and half-day holiday on Saturdays, their collective action prompted the Triangle owners, Isaac Harris and Max Blanck, to strengthen their control over the workers, in ways such as locking them in while they were at work. When the fire broke out, those workers of other companies who had won the strike were enjoying their half-day holiday. As the editor of *The Justice,* a periodical of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, aptly said, "The strike that started at Triangle was not won at Triangle."[3] If the Triangle employers had accepted the demands of their own

workers, the tragedy might have been avoided.

Both the strike of 1909 and the fire of 1911 at Triangle Shirtwaist Company are representative of the Progressive era. While America's laissez-faire policy of the nineteenth century greatly contributed to making the United States rich and powerful, the rapid industrialization and urbanization at the turn of the twentieth century created intolerable problems, such as poverty, disease, unhealthy working conditions, overcrowding houses, and rampant political corruption. It is the era when Jacob A. Riis shocked the world with his photos, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, while muckrakers were committed to exposing scandals and corruptions of politicians and large corporations. In fact, the land of equal opportunities became far from the reality in which only one percent of American corporations came to control more than thirty-three percent of the manufacturing by the end of the nineteenth century, and more than 4,000 companies disappeared through corporate merger between 1897 and 1924. At the turn of the twentieth century, many Americans were convinced of the pressing need to impose order on the growing chaos and to curb industrial society's most glaring injustices. Instead of laissez-faire, the government should do something to humanize capitalism.[4]

Because the Triangle fire eventually led to the structural changes, it is customary to discuss the legacy of the fire as Progressivism, whereas the strike has occupied a separate place in women's labor history.[5] It is, however, more appropriate to understand the two incidents as one, given the fact that the strike not only failed to give the Triangle workers protections but also strengthened the employers' control of their workers, both wrecked further havoc on the fire. While professional reformers, politicians, and muckrakers have been understood as the leading contributors to the Progressive movement, those ordinary working women of the garment industry in New York were the pioneering Progressives because the strikers had initiated the work to bring about changes. At the 110th anniversary of the strike, this article revisits the strike, drawing mostly from the primary sources, in order to pay tribute to those garment workers who strove to make structural changes in society where people were divided between newly-arrived immigrants and the native-born, between white people and people of color, as well as between the haves and the have-nots, just as we see today. There might be still a lesson for us to learn.

## 2. The Cause of the Strike

New York City at the turn of the twentieth century was a magnet for dissatisfied people from abroad, especially from eastern and southern Europe. Although rapid industrialization in the city created jobs for vast numbers of newly-arrived immigrants, many of the fine assets and skills they brought with them, such as the ability to make an entire dress or embroidery, were not very useful in the piece-work system in factories, which relied on speed and high volume of output.[6]

While Wall Street and Fifth Avenue epitomized the prosperity of New York City, the clothing industry ranked first in 1909 both in employment and production. A number of factors, such as the growing demand of ready-made clothing, the access of New York to cheap immigrant labor, raw materials from the South and Europe, and the latest fashion news from Europe, made the garment trade into a leading industry in the nation for a short period. Within the clothing industry, an increase in the number of female office workers made the shirtwaist trade very successful. The shirtwaist, a women's blouse, a combination of mannish collar and feminine line, represented women's freedom and independence, for women went to work wearing the shirtwaist. By 1900, twenty percent of all manufacturing workers were women, and the textile industry was the largest single industrial employers of women, other than domestic service, which still remained the most common female occupation.[7]

Many German Jews and Russian Jews had experience in the sewing trades in their old countries and aspired to become "the shirtwaist kings."[8] Unlike more prestigious occupations, which were open only to those who were familiar with the language and culture of America, the shirtwaist industry was dominated by newly-arrived immigrants. Eighty percent of the workers in the trade were young women, fifty-five percent of whom were Russian Jews, thirty-five percent were Italian, and seven percent were American.[9]

To make the best profit, a manufacturer employed subcontractors. Subcontractors, mostly men, exploited "girl helpers," the least skilled workers. While the first generation of factory working women had some personal contact with shop owners, the subcontracting system severed the tie between them. Once this system was introduced, manufacturers no longer bothered themselves with individual wages paid to helpers. They merely entered the

total amount paid to subcontractors in their ledgers, taking no responsibility for workers' wages.[10] As one of the employers confessed, "The girls never knew...For a long time they still got the same low pay. Triangle and the inside contractor got the difference."[11]

From the beginning of the twentieth century, New Yorkers saw a great deal of unrest among clothing workers. Interestingly enough, it was a subcontractor, Jake Klein, who initiated the strike against the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in 1908. Tired by "slave-driving," Klein struck for three days along with four hundred workers. The outburst was settled when the company promised to establish the Triangle Employees Benevolent Association. It became apparent, however, that this association was under the complete control of the company. Workers thus started thinking of leaving the association and joining Local 25.[12]

On 28 September 1909, two hundred workers of the Triangle walked out again when they were discharged for joining Local 25. On November 22, Cooper Union on Manhattan's Lower East Side was packed with more than 20,000 people ready to discuss a general strike. It was Clara Lemlich, a 20-year-old Russian immigrant, whose enthusiastic address spoken in Yiddish united the workers in support of a general strike. The next morning the garment district was in chaos: the strike began on 23 November 1909. Clinton Hall, a strike headquarters, was jammed with strikers who wanted to join the union as well as small manufacturers who hurried to settle.

New Yorkers were at first puzzled by this outburst. One reader wrote to the *New York Times* that "the better condition cry" was "too generic and we make further inquiry."[13] In spite of considerable public attention, very few New Yorkers knew what the strikers were fighting for. Even worse, as one paper reported, "very few strikers could tell clearly why they left their work places." Manufacturers repeated that it was "a foolish hysterical strike" and that "not a 5 percent of the strikers know what they are striking for." Several manufacturers said that they had paid more than strikers were now asking for.[14]

It is true that both the average and expert shirtwaist workers, who formed sixty percent and twenty percent of the trade respectively, earned on average nine dollars and eighteen dollars a week, which was not considered so low.[15] In this period, two-thirds of women gainfully employed earned less than six dollars a week, whereas those who worked in such factories as candy, box,

and artificial flowers made only three dollars and fifty cents a week.[16] Indeed, according to a letter in The *World*, a number of working women in the shirtwaist trade earned "a great deal more than men with families."[17]

However, those who thought of the strike as meaningless might have been shocked by the lives of ill-paid workers. New Yorkers came to learn many stories of individual workers. For instance, two strikers attempted suicide in December 1909 because the five dollars a week one of the girls *sometimes* made after two years' experience became insufficient to sustain her life. Although she attended a night school to improve her condition, she lost the meaning of life.[18] They also learned that most of the striking women were single but "married to family"—workers who lived with their families gave unopened pay envelopes to their mothers. Others often saved money to bring their families to America.[19]

Many ill-paid workers struggled to make both ends meet but dared not to initiate the strike. They were terrorized by fear, according to the president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).[20] Unable to see that a concerted action might better their lives, some ill-paid workers desperately tried to reduce expenses and remain obedient to their bosses. The only resistance they attempted was stealing materials from factories, another reason why the Triangle Company had locked workers in when the 1911 fire broke out.[21]

If many shirtwaist workers were paid better than their sisters in other trades and ill-paid shirtwaist workers were too weak to revolt, who started the strike and for what purpose? Clara Lemlich offered her own answer. She confessed that although she had been reported to earn only three to six dollars a week in a bad shop, she actually made fifteen dollars a week in a good shop. "I did not strike because I myself was not getting enough. I struck because all others should get enough."[22]

Although the weekly wages of well-paid workers were not bad in a busy season, a long slack season heavily affected the lives of all shirtwaist workers.[23] In fact, Lemlich's good wages lasted only for two months. One of the common efforts to save money among workers was that they walked between home and factory, which sometimes took three quarters of hour after exhausting workday. Their wages had not been raised since the depression of 1908, in spite of a growing garment industry.[24] What was worse, the soaring prices of the necessities

of life in 1909 made workers' attempt at saving less effective. Working conditions differed considerably among shops as well; while those of large factories were satisfactory, many of small shops had some features of the sweating system. The strike also revealed that some large manufacturers presented wages paid to a group of workers as a salary for one person. As a result, as Clarence Burns of Little Mothers' Aid Association said, working women began to "see the folly of meekly accepting a wage."[25]

If the low wage was unbearable only for a minority of workers, the caprice of bosses affected all; abusive language, yelling, violation of wage scale, and unequal distribution of work by favoritism were common. "Bosses call them down even worse than I imagine the Negro slaves were in the South," said Lemlich.[26] What was at stake for many workers was human dignity stolen by the tyrannical bosses. Employers treated their workers like less than human beings. According to socialist Theresa Malkiel, this strike was "an eruption of a long smoldering volcano, an overflow of suffering, abuse, and exhaustion."[27]

Contrary to the manufacturers' argument that none of their workers complained before, workers had been far from content with their conditions. They did not complain because they could not afford unemployment. Manufacturers made every attempt to exploit young immigrant women: they charged for electricity, needles, thread, and other appliances; they covered a clock with cloth so that workers kept working without knowing of their overtime; if a worker happened to make a lot of money by piece-work, she was forced to work by a less-paid weekly rate. Bosses made tickets by which cash was paid, so tiny that workers often lost them and could not get full wages; if a worker came late by five minutes, she was ordered to go home. Workers had no control over their work or lives.[28]

In addition to the resentment against working conditions, idealism kept workers' fight alive. The Lower East Side was the center of radical ideas, and the notion that collective power could secure justice for a powerless individual was diffused among skilled workers in particular. Workers of New York were militant with a firm belief in the power of organization, rather than legislation, as a means of protection. To those who deeply observed industrial experience, the reality was far from their learned ideas. As one of the working women said, immigrant workers did not expect to encounter czars in America. Those czars were not Americans but Jewish people, the same as most of their employees.[29]

At the same time, the patience of poor workers was equally frustrating to the strike leaders. The "greatest wonder was that the workers endured this constant dragging down of their self-respect," said Lemlich.[30] Strike leaders were eager to awaken those employers who fattened themselves at the price of the workers' dignity and self-respect.

The crux of the matter for the strikers was, however, the union. Because these unorganized young immigrant workers were just "hands" to manufacturers and also because unskilled workers were easily replaced at the caprice of bosses, mistreatment against workers would continue. For shirtwaist workers, whose trade was not standardized, the union was the only protection. After "many years of blindness," the *Call* said this uprising, together with the education provided by labor leaders, awoke workers. The *Call* gladly announced that these new converts finally opened their eyes to the importance of organization and that strikers were eager to listen to the "voice of the new gospel" of unionism.[31]

For the manufacturers who had long enjoyed large profits by exploiting unorganized workers, however, the union was a "disastrous interference" with their business.[32] For them, what was at stake was who should control factories. Their strong fear of losing supremacy was apparent when manufacturers, for the first time in this trade, formed an employers' association just five days after the declaration of the general strike. According to The *World*, members of this association threatened those manufacturers who accepted the union.[33] Unless manufacturers secured solidarity among themselves, only union shops might attract consumers. While protecting themselves from workers and competitors of their own class, large manufacturers denied workers the same right for self-defense. Even though they regarded themselves as "kings," manufacturers were aware of the collective power of workers. They discharged union members and repeatedly told workers that the union was "un-American." Since most of the shirtwaist workers were newly arrived immigrant women who were uncomfortable if they looked un-American, it was a psychologically effective tactic to prevent union activity.

Public response to the union issue was divided. Because manufacturers skillfully used the term "close shop," insisting that it was unpatriotic, a number of people resented it. While strikers meant "protection" by union, manufacturers gave the public the impression that it was an attempt to exclude some

workers. As a result, some defined it as "modified form of murder."[34] It was also true that strikers were so convinced of the organized power that they refused any settlement short of union recognition. This uncompromising attitude surpassed the limit of good tactics to gain public support. It unnecessarily prolonged the strike and lost many sympathizers. For the public, strikers gradually seemed to be "irresponsible and reckless."[35] Growing indifference of supporters and the depletion of money ended the strike.

## 3. The Significance of the Strike

The Shirtwaist Strike or The Uprising of the Twenty-thousand of 1909 was not only unparalleled in its magnitude but also unique in its diversity of people involved. On the call of a general strike for better working conditions, as many as 20,000 workers laid down their scissors together on 23 November 1909. They were unorganized workers of 400 firms from Manhattan to Brownsville, and the strike continued until its end on 5 February 1910.[36] More than 21,000 were Russian Jewish women, 2,000 Italian women, 1,000 native-born white women, and 6,000 Russian men.[37] The Women's Trade Union League of New York, suffragettes of wealth, and socialists also joined the strike. Even for normally indifferent New Yorkers, this sight was too impressive to ignore. "Such a spectacle, covering such a wide area, involving so many interests, social and personal, moral and material, embracing so much of moment to the community, is without parallel," observed socialist William Mailly.[38]

The Uprising of the Twenty-thousand has been known as a women's great achievement; women demonstrated their potential to work together beyond differences of class and nationality. The (New York) *Evening Journal* was tempted to predict that "---perhaps in the future the great chasm between capital and labor will be bridged by woman's hands and women's sympathy and understanding."[39]

However, evidence tells us a different story. It is true that eighty percent of the strikers were women and their sympathizers were also women, but men played a key role in directing the strike and negotiating with the manufacturers.[40] Labor leaders emphasized that working women proved themselves to be unselfish and enduring fighters, but that was nothing new; from the colonial period, women's fighting spirit had been well exhibited through boycotts and mass protests.[41]

While it is unprecedented that some twenty-thousand women of different classes protested shoulder to shoulder, it does not suggest genuine sisterhood. In the first place, the strikers and their sympathizers completely failed to embrace Afro-American women. Nor were they united for a single cause to win the strike. While all of their allies hoped for a successful strike, each ally had a different motivation to help working women. In other words, the real motives of the strikers' allies lay not so much in the labor cause as in their own goals, such as socialism and suffrage. The strike crystallized the division among women more than it united them.

As a labor movement, the strike was of mixed results. The strike increased the membership of Local 25 of the Ladies' Waist Makers' Union from merely a hundred to 20,000 as well as its income from $ 4 a week to $2,400. Those workers who succeeded in gaining union terms, amounting to 300 firms out of 400, received higher wages by twenty percent on average, a working week shortened to 52 hours, the abolition of charges for sewing materials, and legal holidays. However, those who signed the union contract were small shops, playing a relatively minor role in the trade. In fact, "the strike that had started at Triangle was not won at Triangle," as in the words of Leon Stein, a writer for the ILGWU publication. The strikers of Triangle had to return without the recognition of the union.[42] Most of the employers, not workers, of such large firms as the Triangle, organized the Associated Waist and Dress Manufacturers and withheld the union recognition, for which the strikers were fighting. In short, the strike began over the issues of the union and ended with the same problem unsolved in dominant shops. Many working women deserted Local 25 soon after the end of the strike for fear of being discharged by bosses.[43]

Nevertheless, "The Uprising of the Twenty-thousand" is important because it played a role in educating New Yorkers by means of newspapers, pickets, and mass meetings. Through this strike, corruption of employers, police, and magistrate came to the fore, making people realize the need for structural changes. It is remarkable that such a regional labor dispute, caused by the "foreign element," developed social consciousness of New Yorkers. Not only did the shirtwaist strike awaken New Yorkers to social ills but it also changed the personal awareness of the strikers themselves. Most of them were in their teens and still new to the country. Their language problems suggest that they

hardly identified themselves as Americans. This strike exposed those foreign-born young women to American society and helped them see themselves as a part of the working-class in America.

## 4. Strikers and Strikebreakers

### 1) Family, Language, and Religion of the Strikers

Because most of the strikers were under the supervision of their parents, the relationship between strikers and their families affected the strike. One of the well-paid workers, who had learned from her mother that the stronger ought to help the weaker, joined the strike because, as she said, “Even if I wanted to go on working, my mamma says she’d be ashamed to have me.” Another mother of the strikers participated in the fight not by joining the strike but by embarrassing the garment shop that “dared” to sell the products of non-union manufacturers. She told the owner of the shop that she wanted to buy a set of wedding attire not only for her own daughter but also for the daughter’s cousin. Very delighted, the owner pulled “down all his stock” to show her, then she exclaimed: “why ain’t you got a union label? I won’t buy from a place that doesn’t settle with the girls.”[44]

Not all families supported the strike, however. A strike requires courage and sacrifice from all workers, but it was especially hard for those who had confrontations with their families. Because daughters’ wages were essential to family budgets and also because manufacturers paid a lot more to strikebreakers, some parents did not allow their daughters to go to strike. A sixteen-year-old girl, showing her body “covered with bruises literally from head to foot,” said that her father and brother beat her when she refused to go to work. She was so determined not to work that she wanted to apply for asylum.[45] It is impressive that this sixteen-year-old girl felt responsible enough to fight with others. When they chose to strike even against the wishes of their families, it might be the beginning of working-class solidarity among these shirtwaist workers. Rose Schneiderman, a union leader, observed that prior to the strike, many working women not only did not know the names of co-workers but also looked upon others as enemies, “because one might get a better bundle of work than the other.” Once the general strike was declared, however, the idea that “an injury to one is the concern of all” penetrated deeply.[46]

By contrast, some parents were self-centered. A mother of two shirtwaist workers said that it was nothing to her "what other girls get" as long as her daughters brought home "as much as $30 in one week."[47] As the *New York Times* reported, "the father and the mother are not used to this new independence." Finding it necessary to educate a whole family in order to win the strike, members of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) of New York and strikers visited homes of strikebreakers to teach trade unionism. Especially in the case of Italian women, who came from an agricultural background and a tradition of subordination to men, the WTUL tried to make men understand "the place the Italian women hold in modern industrial life."[48]

"A serious problem was the strike-breakers' inability to understand our message of trade unionism. I mean literally to understand," lamented Schneiderman. A mass meeting required at least four interpreters, speaking German, Italian, Polish, and Yiddish. At the same time, the language problem helped employers to discourage working-class solidarity. Manufacturers placed an Italian woman beside a Jewish woman in the factory so that they could not communicate. They also tried to incite antagonism, telling Italians that the strike was an exclusively Jewish activity.[49]

In addition to the language barrier, it was not easy for strikers to reach strikebreakers physically. Strikebreakers were escorted by "strong-arm men," one of whom was "only three weeks out of prison."[50] To avoid confrontation, some companies sent for a taxi so that strikebreakers would not face strikers. Even usually orderly strikers sometimes lost their patience. They yelled at strikebreakers and their escorts, threw "aged but strong eggs" against them. Some strikebreakers were so frightened that they would not go out without escorts. When a fire broke out at the factory of Max Roth on December 15, workers "preferred risking death to being jeered at by the strikers" outside, reported the *New York Times*.[51]

Strikebreakers disrupted concerted action by both taking the place of strikers and joining the union for a few days in order to learn the plans and strength of the union and then going back to tell their bosses. Manufacturers offered a double pay, short working hours, long lunch times with "free lunch and waltz music on the gramophone."[52] The willingness of strikebreakers to take these jobs suggests not only their little trust of and insight into trade unionism but also how badly workers needed money. Strikers understood that they ought

to improve the conditions of all workers so that nobody would break a strike. A number of strikebreakers were strangers to strikers, but some were their co-workers. Observing her co-worker entering the factory, one of the strikers said, "We don't make remarks after her. She gets only $ 4 a week and she'd be striking too, if she had a winter coat."[53]

The *Call*, presumably hoping to urge Italian labor leaders to take some action, emphasized that the strikebreakers were all Italians and that there was danger of "race warfare" between Jewish strikers and Italian strikebreakers. In response, Italian male socialists and trade unionists got right to work; they established a special headquarters, held meetings, and urged Italian newspapers to stop advertising for strikebreakers. Their efforts bore fruit. Over 3,000 Italian women joined the picket line, and "for the first time in the history of the Italian labor movement in New York City," Italian labor leaders were asked to make a speech at the Hippodrome meeting.[54]

The church also influenced the attitude of shirtwaist workers toward the strike. An Italian woman explained why many strikebreakers were her folks. She said that one day a priest came to her factory to tell workers if they struck, they would go to hell.[55] On the other hand, some churches felt responsibility for the settlement of the strike, viewing it as a community's problem. One of them was Church of the Holy Trinity in Brooklyn. Its rector John H. Melish made a special effort for publicity and early settlement. Presiding as chairman of the Hippodrome meeting, he protested against "the use of the police power by any one class in the community against another."[56] "Tired of the strike" and hoping to end it before a new year, the Manhattan Congregational Church went to the headquarters of the manufacturers, but in vain.[57]

### 2) Immigrant Strikers and Afro-American Strikebreakers

The most serious flaw in this strike was the attitude of strikers' toward Afro-American working women. While fighting for justice and social betterment, strikers and their wealthy philanthropists totally ignored Afro-American people. Complete working-class solidarity, which socialists, trade unionists, and working women sought in this strike, could not be realized as long as Afro-American women remained excluded from the industry. While writing about the strike in precise detail, almost none of the major papers dedicated space to Afro-American working women. Afro-American women,

ninety percent of whom had worked as domestic servants, saw in this strike an opening to work in garment factories as strikebreakers. In early 1910, however, a mass meeting of Afro-American people in Brooklyn resolved "to refrain from injuring other working women" on the ground that they also belonged to the same working-class and that those "white girls who are fighting for better conditions in their trade are her [Afro-American woman's] allies, not her enemies."[58]

How many of them had actually worked as strikebreakers and how many refrained after the meeting are unclear. But it is clear that after the meeting, the *Age*, an Afro-American newspaper, refused to stop advertising shirtwaist maker's positions when they were asked to do so by strike leaders. "In sense and justice," the *Age* said, there was no reason Afro-American women ought to refuse this opportunity. They had not been invited to the union before the strike. Furthermore, the *Age* argued that strike leaders had not promised to keep Afro-American women when the strike was settled. For the *Age*, this strike highlighted the fact that labor leaders considered Afro-American people only "in days of adversity" not in "those of prosperity."[59]

Even at the end of January 1910, according to the *Survey*, neither the union nor union shops admitted Afro-American women. In response, Margaret Dreier Robins, president of the National WTUL, proudly said that the union in New York had one Afro-American member and that of Philadelphia had two. One of them was secretary of her shop committee, "elected by white girls." She emphasized how this secretary was welcome: "---a young Russian Jewess ran up to her," when the Afro-American woman came to the WTUL, "holding out both hands, said, 'I am so glad you have joined us." But this was an exception.[60]

### 3) Native-born Americans and Immigrant Strikers

If Afro-American women were excluded from the strike, many native-born white working women ignored the strike. Jewish working women in particular considered white Americans "as helpless for purposes of concerted action as the Italians."[61] About 1,000 native-born white working women did strike, but for only one week or two out of thirteen-week strike movement.

Several factors account for their indifference. First, native-born white working women shared almost nothing with foreign-born working women.

Most of them worked in uptown shops, which had far better conditions than those downtown where immigrants worked. Furthermore, the skills of the Americans secured satisfactory wages and constant employment. They tended to work at the same shop for years. Consequently, unlike foreign workers, Americans had a certain amount of loyalty to their employers, which prevented protests. American women knew that some of the downtown shops were unsanitary but blamed immigrants. They thought that if only immigrants became skilled, they would be assured good jobs.[62]

American women, therefore, not only felt no need for a trade union but resented the idea as well. Employers repeatedly told Americans that the union was promoted by foreigners and unladylike. Jewish labor leaders regretted this prevailing notion because the truth was that the first women's labor movement in America was organize by the native-born textile workers. Rather than unpatriotic, this fight for justice was very American.[63]

The most tenacious obstacle to native-born white working women's joining the strike was prejudice against foreigners. Because of their skill, native-born white workers regarded themselves as superior to immigrant workers. One of the Americans complained that work done by immigrants was poor. Moreover, the cheap workforce of immigrants sometimes affected Americans. They criticized immigrants for not knowing how to bargain in America. *Life and Labor*, an educational magazine of the WTUL, warned immigrant workers through a story. In one shop, all the American working women left because a Russian woman agreed to work for five dollars a week whereas American sisters had worked for nine dollars a week.[64] The Factory Investigating Commission found cases in which immigrant women were segregated in the work room as well as in other facilities. It was, according to their report, sometimes necessary "to keep them in one room." It was also common for Americans to ridicule the clothes immigrant women were wearing, which was discouraging to these young newly-arrived women.[65]

The striking American women were at a great disadvantage because they formed only seven percent of the total work force, making it appear that the strike did not "appeal at all to the American girls."[66] On the contrary, the fact was that 1,000 strikers represented twenty to thirty percent of all native-born white women in this trade, while less than ten percent of Italians became strikers when the general strike was declared. Considering that Americans had

no shared history with immigrants in Local 25 and no immediate demands, it is fair to say that Americans were rather cooperative.

Americans who joined the strike regarded themselves more as philanthropists than as workers. Knowing the plight of foreign sisters, Americans sympathized with them but did not have the enthusiasm of Jewish strikers. What Jewish workers articulated seemed to Americans to be vague and visionary. Americans needed more definite purposes; immediate returns in the immediate future.

Realizing that it was necessary to make a different appeal to Americans, the WTUL established a special strike headquarters and visited Americans in their houses to teach unionism. Ironically, after the strike it became apparent that native-born white working women were ardent unionists, but not good fighters. By contrast, Schneiderman found during the strike that Jewish women were aggressive fighters but not loyal unionists: "---to make them stick to an organization after a strike, is the hardest job anybody can be up against." "It is hard to get the American girls into the organization," she continued, "but when you once get them, you have them, they are with you." The shirtwaist strike also revealed that unless bigger shops, where Americans worked, were organized, unionism could not be achieved.[67]

### 4) What Strikers Learned

The strike exposed working women to a larger world than their own shops and homes. Because the strike was discussed everywhere in New York, strikers had to learn the principles of the trade unionism, socialism, and suffrage as well as the art of a good argument and speech. Because public support was crucial, strikers had to both convince New Yorkers of the importance of this struggle and to argue with bosses on the streets sometimes. It was not easy, for they had no such experience before and also many of them still had a language problem. In spite of physical danger and humiliation, they showed an ability to undertake many tasks, such as picketing, holding mass meetings, acting as sandwich-girls and "newsies."

According to The *Call*, "the most remarkable feature of this strike is the absence of leaders. All the girls seem to be imbued with a spirit of activity."[68] Needless to say, working in factories requires responsibility, but to express opinions in public requires another kind of responsibility. One of the

strikers explained to Mayor George B. Mclellan in person how the police treated her. Under the caption of "GIRL STRIKERS TALK OVER OWN SIGNATURE," twenty strikers gave The *World* their comments with signature. In writing the daily progress of the strike, the press, especially The *World* and The *Call,* specified the name, age, and working place of both a striker and a strikebreaker. It can be said that presenting themselves before a variety of people reinforced these women's sense of responsibility as members of American society, as well as their class consciousness as representatives of working people.[69]

Collective power is another lesson. Though strikes were common occurrences, it was meaningful for those 20,000 who had never participate in a concerted action before to experience its greatness. While the strike did not change the balance of power between capital and labor, shirtwaist workers demonstrated that even unorganized working women were able to limit the tyrannical power of bosses. Even Lemlich, called "the Joan of Arc," was surprised: "We never really expected that the mass of the workers would be inspired and come out. I seem to see the realization of the words of Karl Marx."[70] Manufacturers also learned of the ready help of well-to-do women for their working sisters.[71]

## 5. Municipality

In addition to manufacturers and strikebreakers, the shirtwaist strikers unexpectedly confronted another enemy: police and magistrates. Police brutality and magistrates' discrimination against strikers had begun when 200 workers walked out at the Triangle. The police, completely disregarding the law allowing workers to strike, hit, beat, clubbed, and sometimes stabbed strikers. One of the officers frankly said that they were hired by the manufacturers to "protect scabs."[72] To discourage the strikers as well as to empty the treasury of the union for the use of bail and bonds, the police arrested the strikers in large numbers. When the WTUL began to play a central role at the third week of the Triangle strike, they found the police discriminating against the "young foreign speaking girls," while taking care not to arrest WTUL women, who were English-speaking wealthy women. The[73] WTUL's letter of protest to the Police Commissioner Baker was completely ignored.[74]

Ironically, it was the police who effectively publicized the Triangle strike. The arrest of Mary Dreier, the well-to-do president of the WTUL, occupied the first page of every major newspaper on November 5. Drier, "a frail young woman," was struck by a strikebreaker and was arrested.[75] For the police, who tried to distinguish working women from wealthy sympathizes, it was a "blunder."[76] The arresting officer apologized: "Why didn't you tell me who you were. I wouldn't have touched you."[77] It was only then that people realized that it took as many as 40,000 workers in New York to supply shirtwaists and that one of the largest factories, the Triangle, was on strike. Before this incident, the idea of a general strike had been unthinkable to Local 25. The press, however, furnished the union with a chance. It both increased the sympathizers and stimulated class-consciousness among shirtwaist workers.[78]

At first, some New Yorkers were suspicious of news coverage about police brutality. In response to Dreier's observation that "employers had 'sugared' the police," one woman decisively told the *New York Times* that "it is untrue."[79] When a group of socially well-known people, such as Lillian Wald of the Henry Street Settlement, formed a committee to protect strikers from misconduct of the police, the editors of the *New York Times* expressed their wonder why "the excellent and very well-meaning ladies and gentlemen" took pains to criticize the police.[80] Inspired by the fighting strikers, the committee realized that "the time is ripe" to bring justice to the corrupt police. In the face of undeniable facts, the supporters of the police were defenseless.

Outraged by injustice, 10,000 people marched to City Hall on December 3, bringing 30,000 signatures to protest to Mayor Maclellan. He was amazed at their stories but did nothing. When he was invited to the Hippodrome meeting on the subject of the strike, he declined, as newspaper reported, on the ground that "he was not interested in the welfare of 40,000 striking girls."[81] How many New Yorkers other than strikers actually participated in these meetings and marches is unknown. But the press coverage was powerful enough to reach a large public. In fact, after the arrest of Dreier, a large crowd gathered in the garment district to see how policemen treated the strikers.[82]

The mayor's attitude was echoed in every part of the city government. Those who volunteered to attend the night court told the press that magistrates unhesitatingly charged strikers and discharged strikebreakers, regardless of evidence. The volunteers asked people to come and see how corrupt the

magistrates were. Most of the magistrates simply did not listen to strikers. One of numerous examples was the case of Anne Dump. Severely beaten up by a strikebreaker, she was forced to stay in bed for two days. Magistrate Barlow was "displeased" with her because she answered through an interpreter because of a language difficulty. Barlow held Dump instead of the strikebreakers.[83]

The shirtwaist strike also revealed the negligence of factory inspectors. One reason for strikers' insistence on union recognition was that they knew that the law was never violated in the eyes of factory inspectors. Foremen were vigilant in making sure workers would say "the right thing," and inspectors were "regularly duped."[84] When the *Survey* attempted to investigate shirtwaist factories, the State Labor Department refused to provide any information on factories against the promise the officials had made. The Department also advised that "manufacturers were in such an irritable frame of mind from the criticism that it would be impossible to enter any of the shops." But to their surprise, the representatives of the *Survey* were "courteously received and promptly admitted into" shops, presumably because manufacturers wanted to secure public support and also because some of those shops were large enough to have good conditions.[85]

Publicity against city authorities by the press brought strikers double-edged effects. While it elicited emotional and financial support from the public, the emphasis on police activities rather than labor dispute obscured the strike itself. Nonetheless, the injustice of the police and magistrates helped strengthen solidarity among strikers and their allies. It even drew attention from those who had no interest in the labor cause itself. Instead of dismissing fighting immigrants as uncivilized rebels, people came to see that "they were working not merely for themselves but for society as a whole," which muck-raker Ida Tarbell called "a new solidarity of society."[86] People felt it as their duty to help working women maintain good health, at least for the sake of the community, if not for the benefit of these women themselves. The strike brought to a heterogeneous mass of people the idea of common interest for social development as well as a strong sense of justice.[87] As the *Survey* warned people, police brutality was not only the fault of the policemen but also that of the community who chose them.[88]

## 6. Strike Sympathizers

With zealous enthusiasm, some public-minded women of wealth sought to reform and civilize the man-made capitalist society, despite that they themselves benefited from it. This is a period in which many women would no longer comply with male supremacy. It was evident from the growing suffrage movement and the unprecedentedly high divorce rate. Wealthy women became more self-conscious and tried to shape their own identities.[89]

It was these women who added an educational dimension to the battle. Most of them were upper-class suffrage activists, such as O. H. P. Belmont of the Political Equality Association and Anna Shaw of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Others were socialists, such a Theresa Malkiel and Rose Pastor Stokes.[90] The strike, which cost $100,000 altogether, was largely financed by contributions from these people. More importantly, well-known wealthy women, called the "Mink Brigade," lent prestige and respectability to the strike. New Yorkers recognized that, as Tarbell put it, "it is a movement which must be respected." The list of those who expressed their support in the press, such as Helen Taft, a daughter of the President, Anna Morgan, a daughter of J. P. Morgan, and the English playwriter George Bernard Shaw, was effective enough to discourage strike critics.[91]

Although the contribution of the well-to-do was invaluable, they caused more troubles than if they had not participated in the strike. First of all, they shifted the characters of the strike from a pure labor struggle to a political movement. At the outset of the general strike, the WTUL and Local 25 repeatedly declared that it should not be "confused with a political movement."[92] However, because the "Mink Brigade" carried more weight with New Yorkers than labor organizations, the center of the strike gradually shifted to suffragettes, especially O. H. P. Belmont. In fact, when a group of lawyers offered their services for the strikers, they approached Belmont, not the union headquarters.[93] Because suffrage activists arranged mass meetings and parades for the sake of the strikers, it seemed to the public that the shirtwaist strike and "a feminist movement" were identical.[94] As a result, the strike led to strange coalitions: strikers, unionists, and suffragists on the one hand, and strikebreakers, non-unionists, and ant-suffragists on the other. Suffragists held mass meetings to teach strikers that the industrial struggle and women's suffrage movement

should go together. By contrast, Rosenthal Brothers & Co. one of the factories that still had workers at work, asked anti-suffragist Mrs. William Forse Scott to address non-union women on the subject of "personal liberty and respect for law and order."[95]

The strike gave suffragists a golden opportunity to reach working women. Anna Shaw confessed at the Hippodrome that although she had been seeking to cooperate with working women for a long time, she had not known how to get together. Because this strike gave women a valuable experience---how to act together, she thought it would help the success of the suffrage movement.[96] Some suffragists went too far. They argued that strikers were treated badly because they had no votes. They argued that the mayor would not have ignored their protests had these 20,000 women exercised political power. Women's votes might have made a difference, but in this particular strike city officials mistreated strikers because of prejudice against poor, young, foreign girls. By contrast, they were very polite to women of wealth because of their individual power.[97]

Strikers generally did not share the enthusiasm of the suffragists for the vote, for they observed that workingmen with votes failed to prevent strikes. Moreover, they "wanted something right away": they could not count on the future. To working women, political equality was not likely to precede all other forms of equality. What was worse, as one of them said, "politics would only add to the burden."[98]

Even thought the ballot did not seem to be a panacea for this strike, working women were not entirely opposed to it. Labor leaders saw the vote as a means of educating the rank and file. The ballot would expose working women to a wider range of society. A working woman should be educated so that she could improve her environment through politics.[99]

While suffragists had an educational impact on the strikers, their wealth demoralized the independent spirit of some of the strikers. After risking arrest and a large bail by attacking a strikebreaker, Minnie Cohen innocently said, "Mrs. Belmont has enough money."[100] Socialists were especially afraid that the "Four Hundred (dollars)" would blind "those poor girls" to the working-class consciousness. The *Call* repeatedly warned workers that they should not depend upon bosses or charity but should help themselves.[101]

Most of the strikers appreciated wealthy supporters not only because of

their financial contributions but also because they treated with respect those working women who were used to being treated poorly. One of the strikers said that she would never forget “those good ladies” in her life because they treated her “nicely” and made her forget that she was a poor working woman. For her, “their friendship and sympathy are worth more than money.”[102] On the other hand, there were some, mainly well-paid workers, who regarded the contribution of money as an attempt to equalize the disparity of wealth. They openly said that “we were disappointed because it was only a thousand dollars, and we had expected more from ladies of means.”[103]

New Yorkers were not surprised at social extremes, but no ordinary person felt comfortable with the extravagance of the bourgeoisie. Strategies of wealthy suffragists for publicity were often so excessive and odd that some people were offended. One example was the suffragists’ “Fifth Avenue Parade” of “richly furnished” automobiles. Another was the “floral tribute”; when seven strikers were released form the workhouse, they were decorated with bronze medals as a token of martyrs who endured imprisonment for principle. “Mrs. Belmont’s tea party” for those “good” employers who signed the union contract was another example. Such incidents all proved good copy for papers but not suitable tactics for common people.[104] Indeed, many people argued that wealthy women found a “novel amusement” in which strikers were merely puppets and that they were using this opportunity to escape from their boredom. Men in particular felt that wealthy women just wanted to demonstrate their power.[105]

The *World*, impressed by the sympathy of wealthy women toward working sisters, questioned whether workingmen could expect the same treatment from “Fifth Avenue or Wall Street.”[106] The newspaper’s tribute to the humanity of women, however, was misconceived because only a small minority of women actually helped the strike. Strikers were surprised at so many coins in the donation from prestigious women’s clubs.

The reaction of Wall Street men to the strikers illustrated an entrenched feeling of class superiority and indifference to the plight of immigrant working women. The *Call* published a special issue, written by Vassar graduates in support of the strike, for the purpose of wider publicity and fund raising. They also hoped to show the public “how intelligent, well-dressed, and refined the strikers” were in order to counter strike opponents who thought of factory

women as “stupid, ignorant things.”[107] Hundreds of strikers “invaded every part of the city,” and this unusual sight in the severe winter appealed to many New Yorkers’ hearts. They paid more than The *Call*’s price in order to express encouragement and sympathy. Forty-five thousand copies were sold, bringing strikers three thousand dollars within one and half days. While the majority of those who bought the special edition were workingmen and “sales ladies,” “the worst” group to strikers were people of Wall Street. One of the strikers was so angry that she could not speak to “a set of snobs” who failed to treat strikers as human beings. One of these businessmen mercilessly warned that strikers “would starve before the manufacturers would give in.” While women of the upper-class and the middle-class were sympathetic to working women, wealthy men were only a little better than the police.[108]

This attitude did not always come from antagonism toward the working class. Rather, there was a strong sentiment about how women should behave. A group of wealthy women told strikers not to sell newspapers on the street. The *New York Tribune* remarked that strikers fought strikebreakers by “the most approved feminine tactics”---pulling hair and throwing rotten eggs or snowballs were common.[109] The New York State Factory Investigating Commission asked Melinda Scott of the WTUL if women lost “a certain amount of their femininity” when they organized unions. Her answer was, of course, “No.”[110]

The most serious problem of wealthy sympathizers was that they were uninterested in the labor cause itself. What troubled large manufacturers were the grievances strikers articulated most bitterly: bad working conditions. Employers were confident that such conditions did not exist. Mr. Leiserson, against whom Lemlich protested, announced that he would give five thousand dollars to any charity if what strikers described could be proven. In spite of repeated requests by manufacturers to investigate factories, none of the wealthy women responded. It is possible that they feared to disclose relatively good conditions in the large factories after gaining so much public support through the “better working condition” propaganda. In any case, it seemed to the public that wealthy supporters manipulated strikers for their own interests.[111]

The strike served to educate the upper-class women, helping to correct some of their misconceptions about factory women. Many wealthy women had assumed that the factory was a stop on the road to prostitution and that

factory women "ought to look tired-out." Agnes Nestor, a glove maker and later a member of Chicago WTUL, was amused when her best clothes at a woman's club meeting did not comply with the stereotype of what her audience expected. "You are not real working girl! Look at the good blouse you are wearing!," exclaimed a clubwoman.[112]

Knowing each other closely, however, does not necessarily lead to better understanding. The more working women became acquainted with "the society women," the more they realized how wide the gulf between them was. It was too wide to be narrowed with money and sympathy. The name of "sisterhood" concealed a fragile relationship between the two extremes of unequal power. Working women saw their allies as the "fortunate," while allies saw working women as the "helpless" Pity inevitably accompanied the allies' feeling of superiority. The *Evening Journal* reported that Anne Morgan was determined to work for strikers "with her social standing and her father's tremendous wealth." Rose Stokes, socialist of wealth, announced that she would use "every influence in her power" on behalf of shirtwaist sisters.[113]

But there was a limit to cooperation between women of the working-class and their wealthy sympathizers. Many people keenly felt that the benevolent intervention of non-working women could not change the industrial situation. When Belmont tried to extend this strike to all working women in New York, female schoolteachers refused it on the ground that they did "not believe a sympathetic strike of this kind would gain anything."[114]

Finally, a careful reader of the press would not believe that women were united for a common cause. The conflict between suffragettes and socialists was obvious. Socialists denounced the support of wealthy people as false friendship on the ground that women of the capitalist class could never understand working women.[115] For many female socialists, the strike was a test of their ability to help working women as well as a good chance to recruit new members. Although the International Workingmen's Association launched the socialist movement in New York as early as the 1860s, progress had been slow. In spite of many opportunities in which they could have taken an active role, socialists failed to serve the working-class because they were not well-organized.[116]

Socialists were not opposed to the vote for women. They accepted the necessity of women's political liberation. Stokes advised working women not

to let the strike victory be their ultimate goal. She told them that they "should identify themselves with the women of suffrage movement."[117] Yet, socialists thought that the ballot could do little good unless people used it to free themselves industrially. Stokes also criticized workingmen for supporting their employers politically while fighting against them industrially.

As socialists became overshadowed by the suffragettes, however, they started criticizing suffragists and capitalists together. Instead of arguing over the issue of how to help strikers, suffragists and socialists seemed to fight over which would get working women on their side. Malkiel wrote in The *Call*: "Comrades, every moment has its opportunities; this is ours. These new recruits are still open to conviction."[118] Socialists were positive that suffragists were expecting to recruit working women by using the socialists. Within a month of the general strike, the *New York Times* interpreted the strike as an open battle between these two interests, with the voice of fighting strikers diminished.[119]

## 7. Conclusion

History makes us wonder if some of us are here only to suffer for the benefit of future generations. Courageous shirtwaist strikers of the Triangle had little reason to believe that some of them were to be burned to death only one year later without having benefited from their exertions. Triangle Shirtwaist Factory has been best remembered for its fire because of its heavy casualties and resultant workplace safety. But we should also keep in mind that Triangle workers had already planted the seeds of reform when they initiated the strike by exposing corruption between business and politics, which forced many New Yorkers to realize a dire need for structural changes in American democracy.[120]

When the shirtwaist workers rose up, New Yorkers were not unaware of the hardship of immigrants in industry, for they were accustomed to seeing immigrants used "as an excuse to permit the dehumanizing of our cities," as in the words of Alice Henry, a member of the WTUL.[121] When the strikers unexpectedly encountered injustice of the municipality, however, New Yorkers realized that the problem was not limited to the immigrant. Rather, a number of people began to understand that the problem of the immigrant was a different

face of a larger social problem and that "the betterment of one element is for the ultimate political advancement of all," reported The *World*.[122]

If the strikers provided New Yorkers with a strong stimulus for a new social consciousness, Henry was right that "every race that has settled down here in this America has some special contribution to bestow." As the strike proved, however, the cooperation of native-born Americans was vital in the process of social betterment. Public sympathy with the strikers made responsible manufacturers feel obliged to treat their workers better.

As Tarbell pointed out, what is remarkable about the "Uprising of Twenty-thousand" is that New Yorkers recognized that "it is a movement which must be respected." She was impressed by "a new and growing sense of the solidarity of society that if anybody was making a fight against a wrong, it was their business to stand by and help."[123] Both immigrant working women and wealthy American women found a sense of comradeship with a group that they had previously considered the "other half." Together they succeeded in creating an atmosphere in which more people would pay attention to the condition of women as a whole. These young immigrant workers also discovered that they had power to fight for their ideals and to make a difference. Even though their life styles would never match, both immigrants and wealthy women of New York saw their potential to better their society by acting on together and remaining true to their own ideas.[124]

As a labor movement, it was the first great strike of women. As reported by the U.S. Congress, while historically "strikes by women alone [had been] infrequent," the shirtwaist strike initiated by a single shop, the Triangle, came to influence shirtwaist makers outside of New York, such as Philadelphia, and other trades. Congress discovered that women were willing to sacrifice themselves with "others for a common cause" and that they were often more persistent than men.[125] In retrospect, it sounds an exaggeration, but to the contemporaries, the general strike of the shirtwaist workers "marked the first stage of a revolution," for it provided a solid foundation for unionism in the industry.[126]

When foreign-born shirtwaist working women began to feel close to New Yorkers, the Triangle fire entirely severed their ties. It was not until this tragic fire that people learned the importance of protective laws; collective bargaining was not enough.[127] Great changes were made, but those who lost their

lives in the fire were not to be the ones to reap the benefits.[128] Those of us who have benefited from their sacrifice had better listen to the newcomers because their voices are likely to make our society more democratic for all.

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1 The *Washington Post*, 17 Sept. 2019.

2 Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I knew* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), pp. 17, 31.

3 Leon Stein, *The Triangle Fire* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1962), p. 168.

4 Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), ch. 5; Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), p. 609; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch.3.

5 The literature on the strike is rich, encompassing many disciplines. The most recent work from the viewpoints of Progressivism and industrial democracy is aforementioned Greenwald, *The Triangle Fire: The Protocols of Peace, and Industrial Democracy in Progressive Era New York*, which also covers the reform after the fire. Alfred Allan Lewis in his *Ladies and Not-So-Gentle Women* (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2000) places the strike more in line with women's history.

6 Forty percent of 4,766,883 New Yorkers were foreign-born in 1910, and more than half of them were from eastern and southern Europe. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*; Louis C. Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1919), pp. 10-50.

7 Roger Waldinger, "Another look at the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union: Women, Industry structure and collective action," pp. 90-91, in Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work & Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History* (Boston: Routlege & Kegan Paul, 1985).

8 Stein, *The Triangle Fire*, p. 158.

9 *Thirteenth Census of the United States,* 1910; David C. Hammack, *Power and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 39-51.

10 Louis Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924), pp. 146-47; Woods Hutchinson, "The Hygienic Aspects of the Shirtwaist Strike," *The Survey* 23, 22 January 1910, p. 544; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Schoken Books, Inc., 1976), pp. 154-59.

11 Stein, *The Triangle Fire*, p. 163.

12 Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers,* pp. 144-67; Frank E. Sheldon, *History of the Strike* (New York: Ladies' Waist Makers' Union, 1910), pp. 2-6.

13 The *New York Times*, 8 January 1910.

14 *Ibid.*, 25 November and 4 December 1909.

15 Hutchinson, "The Hygienic Aspects of the Shirtwaist Strike," p. 544; Constance Leupp, "The Shirtwaist Makers' Strike," *The Survey 23,* 18 December 1909, pp. 383-84.

16 U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Summary of the Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage Earners in the United States*, December 1915, p. 96; *The Evening Journal*, 3 January 1910.

17 The *World*, 12 December 1909.

18 The *New York Times*, 2 December 1909.

19 Sue Ainslie Clark and Edith Wyatt, *Making Both Ends Meet: The Income and Outlay of New York Working Girls* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), p. 60.

20 Max D. Danish and Leon Stein, *ILGWU News-History* (New York: International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, 1950), 1909-1911, p. 4.

21 Stein, *The Triangle Fire*, p.168.

22 The *New York Times*, 16 December 1909.

23 Waldinger, "International Ladies Garment Workers Union," pp.92-93.

24 Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), p. 324.

25 The *Evening Journal,* 2 January 1910.

26 *Ibid*., 26 November 1909.

27 The *Call*, 29 December 1909.

28 Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America with the Research Assistance of Ida Goshkin and Ellen Wertheimer* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 293-97; Mary Brown Sumner, "The Spirit of the Strikers," *The Survey 23*, 22 January 1910, pp. 550-55.

29 Most of the manufacturers in the shirtwaist industry were German Jews, while workers under them were Yiddish-speaking Russian Jews.

30 Sumner, "The Spirit of the Strikers," p. 554.

31 The *Call,* 4 & 29 December 1909.

32 Charles S. Bernheimer, "The Shirt Waist Strike," *University Settlement Studies* (New York: University Settlement, 1910), p. 5.

33 The *World*, 28 & 30 November 1909.

34 The *New York Times*, 18 December 1909.

35 Helen Marot, "A Woman's Strike," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* (New York: The Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, 1910), p. 126.

36 Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, pp. 144-67.

37 *Report on the Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners in U.S.*, "History of Women in Trade Unions," 61st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1911, pp. 204-24.

38 William Mailly, "The Working Girls' Strike," The *Independent*, 23 December 1909, No. 3186, pp. 1419-20.

39 The *New York Evening Journal*, 3 January 1910.

40 Louis Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers* (New York: B. W. Huebsch Ind., 1924), p. 156.

41 Judith O'Sullivan identifies the Daughters of Liberty, established in 1765, was America's first society of working women. Judith O'Sullivan, *Workers and Allies*

(Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1975), p. 25.

[42] Stein, *The Triangle Fire*, p. 168.

[43] The (New York) *Call*, 6 December 1909; Charles S. Bernheimer, "The Shirt Waist Strike," *University Settlement Studies* (New York: University Settlement, 1910), pp. 3-10.

[44] The *World,* 12 December 1909.

[45] William Mailly, "How Girls Can Strike," *The Progressive Woman,* vol. 3, February 1910, no. 53, p.7.

[46] Rose Schneiderman, *All for One* (New York: Paul S. Erickson, Inc., 1967), pp. viii, 86.

[47] The *World*, 12 December 1909.

[48] The *New York Times*, 19 December 1909; National Women's Trade Union League of America, *Proceedings of the Third Biennial Convention*, 1911, p. 19.

[49] Schneiderman, *All for One,* p. 97; Alice Henry, *The Trade Union Woman* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1915), p. 94; National Women's Trade Union League, *Proceedings of the Second Biennial Convention*, 1910, p. 16.

[50] The *World,* 12 December 1909.

[51] The *New York Times,* 16 December 1909.

[52] Sumner, "The Spirit of the Strikers," p. 553.

[53] The *World*, 12 December 1909.

[54] The *Call,* 24 November, 25 November, 6 December 1909.

[55] The *New York Times*, 16 December 1909.

[56] *Ibid.*, 6 December 1909.

[57] *Ibid.*, 24 December 1909.

[58] *Ibid.*, 4 January 1910.

[59] The *New York Age*, 20 January 1910.

[60] The *Survey* 23, Editorial by Alfred T. White, 29 January 1910; Margaret Dreier Robins, "Shirtwaist Makers' Union," *The Survey 23*, 19 February 1910, p. 788.

[61] NWTUL, *Life and Labor* (September 1911), p. 282.

[62] Schneiderman, *All For One*, p. 107; Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals & As Sisters: Feminism, Unionism, and the Women's Trade Union league of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980, pp. 110-21.

[63] Schneiderman, *All for One*, pp. 70-76.

[64] NWTUL, *Life and Labor* (January 1911), p. 21.

[65] Clark and Wyatt, *Making Both Ends Meet*, pp. 89-90, 133; *State of New York Preliminary Report of the Factory Investigating Commission,* p. 1635.

[66] NWTUL, *Proceedings of the Third Biennial Convention,* 1911, p. 19.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 48; Dye, *As Equals & As Sister*, pp. 115-21.

[68] The *Call*, 29 December 1909.

[69] The *World*, 22 December 1909.

[70] Sumner, "The Spirit of the Strikers," p. 555.

[71] The *New York Times*, 19 December 1909.

[72] The *New York Tribune*, 11 December 1909.

[73] Women's Trade Union League of New York, "Lockout At the Triangle Waist Company," 1909, p. 3.

[74] While The *Call* followed the Triangle strike from the beginning, this labor paper reached only limited number of people; Helen Marot, "A Woman's Strike," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* (New York: The Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, 1910), p. 121.

[75] The *New York Times*, 5 November 1909.

[76] WTUL of New York, "Lockout At the Triangle Waist Company," p.4.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, p. 151; Helen Marot, "A Woman's Strike," p. 121.

[79] The *New York Times*, 5 November, 12 December 1909.

[80] *Ibid.*, 21 December 1909.

[81] The *New York Times*, 6 December 1909; The *World*, 6 December 1909.

[82] The *New York Times*, 11 December 1909.

[83] The *Call*, 31 December 1909.

[84] Sumner, "The Spirit of the Strikers," p. 552.

[85] Hutchinson, "The Hygienic Aspects of the Shirtwaist Strike," p. 542.

[86] Ida Tarbell, "The Shirt-Waist Strikers," The *American Federationist*, March 1910, vol. 17, no. 3, p.209.

[87] Clark and Wyatt, *Making Both Ends Meet*, p. 84.

[88] Hutchinson, "The Hygienic Aspects of the Shirtwaist Strike," p. 548.

[89] Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 273; The *World*, 6 December 1909.

[90] According to Montgomery, socialist leadership successfully conducted a number of strikes of 1909, including the garment strike. David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 289.

[91] Levine, The Women's Garment Workers, p. 165; Schneiderman, *All for One*, p. 8; Tarbell, "The Shirt-Waist Strikers," p. 209.

[92] The *New York Times*, 2 & 3 December 1909.

[93] *Ibid.*, 25 December 1909.

[94] The *World*, 22 December 1909.

[95] The *New York Times*, 18 December 1909.

[96] The *World*, 6 December 1909.

[97] The *Evening Journal,* 6 January 1910.

[98] The *World*, 6 December 1909.

[99] Schneiderman, *All for One*.

[100] The *New York Times*, 23 December 1909.

[101] *Ibid.*, 20 December 19109; The *Call*, 2 December 1909.

[102] The *World*, 17 & 22 December 1909.

[103] Schneiderman, *All for One*, p. 93.

[104] The *Word*, 22 December 1909, 8 February 1910; The *New York Times*, 23 December 1909.

[105] The *New York Times*, 16 & 23 January 1910.
[106] The *World,* 15 December 1910.
[107] *Ibid.*, 29 December 1909.
[108] *The Call,* 30 December 1909; Theresa Malkiel, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*, pp. 59-60.
[109] The *New York Tribune*, 27 November 1909.
[110] *State of New York Preliminary Report of the Factory Investigating Commission*, Albany 1912, vol. 3, p. 1803.
[111] The *New York Times*, 2 December 1909; *The Call*, 29 December 1909.
[112] Agnes Nestor, *Woman's Labor Leader* (Illinois: Bellevue Books Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 48-62.
[113] Malkiel, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker*, Schneiderman, *All for One*; The *Evening Journal,* 5 January 1910; *New York Tribune,* 29 November 1909.
[114] The *New York Times*, 8 January 1910.
[115] Antoinette F. Konikow. "Smiling Joe," *The Progressive Woman*, vol. 3, March 1910, no. 34, p. 6; The *New York Times,* 20 December 1909.
[116] Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism* 1870-1920 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981).
[117] The *New York Times*, 1 December 1909.
[118] The *Call*, 4 December 1909.
[119] The *New York Times*, 20 December 1909.
[120] Like Sen. Warren's remark, people continue to be interested in the fire. See, for instance, the *New York Times*, 21 February 2011 ("A Century Later, the Roll of the Dead In a Factory Fire Now Has All 146 Names")
[121] Alice Henry, *The Trade Union Woman* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1915), pp. 119-21.
[122] The *World*, 22 December 1909.
[123] Tarbell, "The Shirt-Waist Strikers," p. 209.
[124] Henry, *The Trade Union Woman*, p. 139.
[125] *Report on Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners in U.S.*, "History of Women in Trade Unions, " vol. 10, 61st Congress, 2nd Sess. 1911, p. 205 & 222.
[126] Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, p. 166.
[127] Perkins, having worked with both rank-and-file workers as well as professional reformers and the state, realized the importance of the law. Greenwald, *The Triangle Fire,* p. 213.
[128] David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003), pp. 194-218.