For All
White-Collar Workers

The Possibilities of Radicalism in New York City’s Department Store Unions, 1934–1953

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Introduction

1.

When the factories moved away from the industrial centers of the North, American labor unions became mere shadows of the mass organizations they had once been. Unionization rates in America in 2004 were at 12.5 percent, the lowest they have been since the 1920s. According to the U.S. government’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, labor unions have been in decline for at least the past twenty years, and arguably for many years more.¹

This decline was not an inevitable result of deindustrialization. Had the labor movement established a strong base in the retail and service industries, it is possible that labor unions would continue to play a central role in American public life. Yet in the retail and service sectors, unions have been noticeably ineffective. In the retail industry today, unionization rates hover around 3.6 percent, as opposed to approximately 12.9 percent in the remaining manufacturing jobs and 14 percent in the construction industry.²

This study seeks to explain the weakness of the American labor movement by explaining why labor failed to organize service-industry workers, particularly retail workers. As a way to better understand this failure, the study begins during the Great Depression, at the founding of the modern labor movement, when powerful and permanent retail workers’ unions seemed a real possibility. In 1930s New York, organizers seemed to be realizing this possibility, and the managers of the largest and most famous stores in the country recognized the unions. The study then looks at the ways in which economic, social, cultural, and political developments of the 1940s and early 1950s forced retail workers’ unions into decline, and permanently weakened the American labor movement.

In the mid 1930s, even as union organizers began to take seriously the possibilities of mass unions of unskilled workers in the great factory towns of the Midwest, they all but ignored the thousands of workers, skilled and unskilled
alike, in retail stores. There were several reasons for this oversight on the part of 1930s union organizers: most important among them, the retail labor force was largely made up of women, and they simply did not fit 1930s understandings of what a worker was. The very concept of a “white-collar worker,” a worker from outside manufacturing or construction, was a radical concept at the time. Indeed, in New York City radical union organizers, associated with the Communist party, were the ones to realize that white-collar workers represented an important part of the working class and could form successful unions. As a result, union organizers affiliated with the Communist Trade Union Unity League set up unions in the city’s department stores in the mid-1930s.\(^3\)

There are many reasons that Communists made for such effective union organizers in the retail industry, besides their insight that white-collar workers were, in fact, workers. Perhaps the most important advantage Communists had was their link to a larger radical movement, one that included unemployed people as well as workers in many industries besides retailing. This mass movement was critical for workers in retail stores who wished to form unions. A strike at a New York City department store, when led by Communists, could gain support from Communists throughout the city. In the 1930s and early 1940s communism functioned as a remarkable network which allowed strikers to call upon a large and diverse group of allies in their battles against store managers.

Additionally, Communists were successful partially because they had a broader conception from the beginning of the rise of the retail workers’ unions of what a strike could be. To Communists, strikes could be ways to claim public space, and on more than one occasion in the unions’ history, workers under Communist leadership lay claim to the stores and the streets surrounding the stores. In areas like Union Square, Brooklyn’s Fulton Street, and Manhattan’s garment district, areas which were already difficult for managers to control, Communists’ willingness to challenge that control still further made them formidable opponents indeed.

Finally, Communists were relatively supportive of working-class militancy. By the late 1930s anti-Communist organizers frequently attempted to restrain workers who were willing to strike, but, with the critical exception of the World War II period, Communists were more willing to support workers’ strikes. As late as September of 1941, Communists in the department store unions demonstrated their support for workers’ militancy, despite less radical union leaders’ emphasis on concession and compromise. And in the late 1940s, when Communists found themselves increasingly on the defensive,
they were still able to find support from the workers they led, by emphasizing their belief in workers’ ability to lead the union at the precise moment when non-Communist union leaders were becoming less tolerant of workers taking initiative in their struggles against management.

These factors made Communists powerful leaders for retail workers in New York City. Communists were virtually unchallenged in their efforts to organize unions in New York City’s department stores, and by the late 1930s most of the major stores in New York City had Communist-led unions: stores such as Gimbel’s, Bloomingdale’s, Stern’s, Loeser’s, and Hearn’s all had unions led by Communists. At Macy’s, Communists played a key but supporting role in a union led primarily by liberal non-Communists.

None of this is to say that Communists were ever ideal union leaders. As other historians have pointed out, communism was, in many respects, a top-down movement. Its leaders could be remarkably racist, sexist, and short sighted, and Communist union organizers made serious policy mistakes throughout the unions’ history, most important among them their failure to adequately challenge racial hiring practices. But in the 1930s they were the only ones who recognized that these department store workers’ unions needed to be formed. As a result, for all their faults, they played a critical role in these unions’ successes.

This study also addresses anti-communism, one of the most important forces behind the failure of American unions in the retail sector. Anti-Communists in the late 1940s and early 1950s forced organizers in the department store unions to take a far more defensive position at the precise moment that store managers weakened the unions by restructuring the retail industry and cutting thousands of jobs. Eventually, union organizers capitulated entirely to the demands of anti-Communists, distancing themselves greatly from the militant labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

In the process of this examination, this study argues that some aspects of anti-communism have been underexplored by historians. In particular, it calls for a reexamination of the Taft-Hartley Act, which among other things required all union leaders to declare themselves non-Communists. I argue that this development not only made it impossible for Communists to lead unions; it also made it impossible for non-Communist and Communist union leaders to work together without acknowledging the political differences between them. In the CIO’s retail union, the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), union leaders were virtually silent on the issue of communism between the union’s founding in 1937 and its disintegration in 1948. This tacit agreement not to use the word “Communist” within the retail
union was critical for the union’s survival, since the national leaders of the union were anti-Communists and the leaders of some of the largest locals were Communists. However, when it was finally apparent that Taft-Hartley would not be overturned, RWDSU leaders could no longer ignore the issue of communism; their attempt to confront this issue split the RWDSU and led to disaster for the future of retail unionism in America.

As other historical studies have done in recent years, this study argues that the history of communism and anti-communism must be placed firmly within a local context. Communist organizers in the department store unions were far more affected by the Great Depression, working conditions in the stores, events in the streets surrounding the stores, the changing role of the federal government, and postwar suburbanization than they were by any policies coming out of the Soviet Union. To say otherwise—to treat American Communists, as some historians have, as mindless drones who took orders directly from the Comintern—is to dilute their politics and to fail to realize the possibilities inherent in the Communist-led union of department store workers.

Adopting a local context for communism requires historians to address the question of how and when Communist party (CP) policies affected activists within local struggles. These policies, I acknowledge, did affect Communists, but far more important than acknowledging the power of CP policies is understanding why Party members or fellow travelers followed these policies. In New York City’s department stores, Communist union organizers sought alliances with non-Communists in the 1930s and early 1940s not because the Comintern called for such policies (at least at some points during these years), but instead because such a policy was a powerful organizing strategy. At the same time, in the late 1940s, as the CP retreated from any sort of united front with liberals, Communist union organizers in New York City’s department stores found themselves isolated primarily because of anti-Communist attacks from the right, not simply because they chose to follow CP policy. Understanding why and how union organizers changed tactics requires far more attention to local conditions than to events or declarations taking place in the USSR.

Adopting a local context for the history of communism also requires historians to determine what constitutes a local context. Here, too, this study makes contributions in addressing the importance of the middle class, contests over public space, and the changing nature of consumption in the history of these unions. Anti-Communists began their most extensive attacks precisely in the years when suburbanization and the rise of the middle class were severely affecting retailing in general and upscale department stores in particular. As historians have long realized, these developments were closely linked to new
patterns of consumption. In this study, I argue that these new patterns of consumption were visible not only in the consumer goods furnishing middle-class suburban homes, but also in a rapidly changing environment within the stores, in part created to better serve middle-class customers. Self-service shopping, which sprung up throughout New York City stores in the early 1950s, allowed managers to increase their control and cut their labor costs, permanently weakening the unions. And the closing of some stores whose managers were unable or unwilling to adjust quickly enough to the new retailing environment left the unions even more vulnerable to anti-Communist attacks.

By focusing on the role of communism in the history of these unions, this study addresses the history of department store workers in America in a very different way than scholars have previously done. Other studies, most importantly Susan Porter Benson's landmark *Counter Cultures*, describe in rich detail the history of worker-management relations in the department stores, although without addressing the unions formed within these stores. In this study, I move beyond the somewhat self-contained department stores that dominated Benson's excellent study, to place these stores within a much larger and more complicated historical framework. This study takes into account processes that affected the stores and unions directly, like suburbanization and the rise of anti-communism. It also looks at the changing nature of the streets outside the stores, streets that were dominated by radical protests and strikes in the 1930s, but rapidly became far less important sites of militant activism in the 1940s and 1950s. Finally, this study looks at larger historical events like the Great Depression and World War II from the vantage point of the stores and the unions.4

While this study moves away from previous studies of department store work and workers in placing greater emphasis on context, it retains the focus on women's history established by many of the scholars on the history of department stores. Women played a number of key roles in the history of New York City's department store unions. They represented, first of all, many of the workers organized within these unions. Second, especially in the early years of the unions' history, some of the most important union leaders were women, largely due to Communists' willingness to recruit women as union organizers. Finally, women played key roles in the unions' history as store customers. Unlike Benson, however, I argue that there was seldom if ever any consciousness of shared femininity between store customers and store workers, especially in the upscale stores where the unions were most successful. Instead, I argue that in the 1930s store workers found themselves in a highly antagonistic relationship with customers. Partially as a result of this antagonistic relationship between department store workers and their wealthy customers, department store workers got
the chance to prove that they shared the negative assumptions about upper-class women that were widespread in this era. During their sit-down strikes at Woolworth's and, later, during their more conventional strike at Gimbel's, women working in the department stores proved that they were as hostile to upper-class women as were any of their male counterparts.5

Women played key roles in the department store unions throughout the unions’ history, but these roles were less pronounced in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Even in these years, union members continued to hold discussions about gender equality and gender relations at union meetings and in the union newspaper. At the same time, by the late 1940s, union leaders openly began supporting the male breadwinner norm, something that had not been the case a decade earlier. By the 1950s, as the unions shifted towards a more conservative political stance, union leaders also supported a more conservative set of gendered assumptions, whether through cheesecake photographs in the union newspaper or fighting for the rights of “breadwinners and heads of families” to take the best-paying jobs.

Finally, this study uses the history of these unions as a way of addressing the history of white-collar workers in America. Particularly in the 1930s, as organizers in the department store unions made their most important gains, the term “white collar worker” had tremendous importance for the unions’ history. During strikes in these years, department store workers actively employed a rhetoric that identified white-collar workers as members of the working class. This rhetoric allowed department store workers on strike to mobilize allies ranging from low-paid office workers to actors, writers, chemists, and doctors. By the late 1930s, however, as these unions entered the CIO, they ceased discussing the specialized nature of white-collar work and white-collar workers in favor of analyses that placed greater emphasis on the shared concerns of all working-class people. Within just a few years, people who had once called themselves “white-collar workers” began thinking of themselves as members of the middle class, and eschewed the sort of alliances with strikers that once gave the unions such power.

The connections between the history of white-collar workers and the history of the department store unions consists of far more than the history of the term “white collar worker” or the changing nature of the middle class. This study addresses the critical issue of when, how, and why white-collar workers became a minor part of the American labor movement. As already suggested, today such workers represent a tiny minority of union members. Statistics demonstrate that this weakness is rooted in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. According to a study of American union membership between 1939
and 1953, the percentage of unionized workers in the service sector (including retailing) grew only slightly in these years, from 6 percent in 1939 to 9.5 percent in 1953. In the textile industry, the only sector of the manufacturing industry with similarly low rates of unionization in the late 1930s, unions grew tremendously in the same period, moving from 7 percent unionized workers in 1939 to 26.7 percent unionized workers in 1953. The numbers for the entire manufacturing industry are even more striking; in the same time period, from 1939 to 1953, the percentage of unionized workers in the manufacturing industries went from 22.8 percent in 1939 to 42.4 percent, a far larger growth both in actual numbers and in percentages.6

As these figures demonstrate, the growth in retail unions between 1939 and 1953 did not have anywhere near the success of the unionization drives in even the least unionized sectors of the manufacturing industries. By 1953, the year this study ends, the possibilities that had been so evident in New York City in the 1930s had disappeared. Divided around the issue of communism, facing managers’ restructuring, suburbanization, and an extremely hostile government, department store union organizers in New York City were struggling to retain those unions that already existed. Fighting this struggle gave union organizers no chance to match the rapid expansion of retailing in post–World War II America.

2.

In recent decades, historians looking at blue-collar workers have discussed the concept of the radical possibilities of the 1930s at great length. In doing so, they have come to critical realizations about this decade. In particular, they have called for bottom-up histories of both American communism and American unions, trends this study seeks to continue.

In the early 1970s a group of labor historians made the changing nature of unions a central concern of American labor history. Using blue-collar workers and their unions as examples, these labor historians argued that unions began as powerful organizations created and controlled by the working class in the early and mid-1930s. During the mid- and late 1930s, these historians argued, paid CIO organizers and CIO leaders stepped in and took over the grassroots labor movement, and finally stamped out most workers’ dissent in their enforcement of the no-strike pledge during World War II.7

At the very moment that labor historians were reshaping their field, other historians were also examining the history of American communism in a new
light. By the 1970s and especially the 1980s many historians of communism argued that Communists had not been the sinister manipulators of the labor movement that consensus school historians had claimed. Instead, these new historians argued, Communists’ role in the labor movement had been far more complex. Communists had served as among the most dedicated union organizers, who fought tirelessly for workers’ rights, especially in the 1930s.8

Increasingly in the 1980s and early 1990s historians portrayed Communist union organizers as far more dictatorial and separated from the rank and file. By 1982, Nelson Lichtenstein was able to argue in Labor’s War at Home that Communists’ willingness to support the World War II no-strike pledge was tantamount to a betrayal of the working class, very similar to other labor leaders’ betrayal in the same era. By the mid-1990s George Lipsitz, in Rainbow at Midnight, took this argument one step further, arguing that the very concept of the Communist party as the workers’ vanguard was destined to separate them from those militant workers who were not willing to be led by Communists. These historians asserted that Communist union leaders, like non-Communist union leaders, benefited from workers’ willingness to strike and resist in the 1930s, but then stamped out that militancy in the 1940s.9

This study seeks to address the issues raised by these historians, most importantly the subject of the missed opportunities of the 1930s. Staughton Lynd correctly called workers’ successes in the 1930s a demonstration of the possibilities of radicalism, a phrase with echoes in nearly every study of the 1930s published since. This study points to one of these possibilities—the possibility for unions in the retail sector—that was even less realized than the possibilities of unionism in the factories that Lynd and his followers examined. To explain why these possibilities existed in the first place, I draw heavily upon the work of historians who have studied 1930s communism as, in part, a gender system. As these gender historians have argued, many Communists shared similar gendered assumptions: in particular, many strongly emphasized the masculine nature of working-class radicalism. While in the early 1930s, Communists did see important possibilities for women to play key roles in community-based organizing in particular, by the late 1930s, according to historians like Elizabeth Faue and Van Gosse, Communists argued that men were the fundamental agents of the working class.10

As these historians make clear, there was a great deal of complexity in Communists’ understandings of gender. Communists did, as Faue especially has pointed out, associate bourgeois femininity with corruption and workers’ oppression. At the same time, many Communists recognized the important role of working-class women in class struggle. Most importantly, in the early
and mid-1930s Communists supported women workers’ unions in ways that many more conservative union organizers did not. Unlike the far more conservative organizers in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Communist union organizers were willing to go into department stores to aid women workers in their struggle to form unions.

This study also addresses some of the themes that Lichtenstein and Lipsitz address, namely, the relationship between Communist union organizers and workers. Unlike Lichtenstein and Lipsitz, however, both of whom focus on blue-collar workers, there is no evidence in the department store unions’ history that Communists were at odds with the most militant workers in the unions. While in the late 1940s a few workers did form anti-Communist blocs within the unions, the anti-Communists represented a tiny and isolated minority within the department store unions in the 1940s. Most members, as demonstrated by the union elections of the late 1940s, continued to support union leaders’ right to hold political beliefs contrary to the beliefs of most workers, and there is no record of any workers in these unions calling for wildcat strikes or rejecting the no-strike pledge.

Rank-and-file anti-communism in the department store unions was a result not of Communists’ errors but of changing economic circumstances in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As suburbanization and restructuring continued, managers laid off workers; Communist union leaders could not prevent this. The end result was that by 1953 the rank and file was constantly criticizing union leaders’ political views, demanding that union leaders recant their radical politics and concentrate more on the bread-and-butter issues workers had to confront. The union leaders, to their credit, followed suit, but this did nothing to help them combat managers’ efforts to restructure the stores, efforts that eventually required fewer workers with fewer skills. The powerful coalitions that had formed around communism during the 1930s would never again reemerge, and the union leaders would find themselves and their membership increasingly isolated and unable to meet the challenge of the structural changes in retailing during the 1950s.

Chapter 1 describes the first major strikes in the department stores of New York City, the Klein’s-Ohrbach’s strikes that took place in New York City’s Union Square in 1934–35. Both Union Square and the stores were highly contested spaces at the time. Communists in the streets of Union Square
repeatedly tried to make the square their own, while police and local business managers (including store managers) worked to contest Communists’ efforts. While these parties struggled over the space in and around Union Square, a related struggle took place over the buildings on the square’s southern border, the Klein’s and Ohrbach’s stores. Store managers found themselves constantly struggling to control working-class consumption, to prevent shoplifting and overcrowding. As these struggles raged, workers at the Klein’s and Ohrbach’s stores, many of them women, went on strike demanding union recognition. With support from Communist organizers in the Trade Union Unity League, the workers at Klein’s and Ohrbach’s were able to launch a dramatic and militant attack on the owners and managers of these stores in strikes that lasted for almost six months. At the end of these strikes, workers were able to declare a partial victory, after which department store workers throughout New York City began organizing unions within their stores.

Chapter 2 discusses the next three years of the unions’ history, from 1935–37. In these years the Communists leading the department store unions sought greater legitimacy by uniting with the AFL’s Retail Clerks International Protection Association (RCIPA). They also led two militant although not very successful strikes in 1935 and 1936. During these strikes Communists found themselves increasingly at odds with the corrupt anti-Communist leaders of the RCIPA, who shut down one of these strikes while condemning the settlement in another. In 1937 workers won their first major victories, in the sit-down strikes at Woolworth’s and other five-and-dime stores. In these strikes, department store workers firmly established themselves as an integral part of the American labor movement. They adopted the same tactics and made many of the same demands as other workers in the fledgling industrial union movement that would result in the CIO. Late in 1937 the department stores’ successful job actions forced CIO leaders to recognize the existence of retail workers, leading to the creation of the CIO’s retail workers’ union, the United Retail Employees of America.

Chapter 3 discusses the ways in which workers created unions at New York City’s upscale 34th Street department stores in the later 1930s. Far more than in the downscale stores, workers’ successes in these upscale establishments resulted in the creation of permanent union locals. Workers faced significant challenges in creating these unions. At stores like Macy’s, Bloomingdale’s, and Gimbel’s, workers found themselves in a highly antagonistic relationship with customers, due largely to the system of consumption practiced at these stores. In part seeking protection from customers, workers joined the union, some of them even leaving the store to become permanent and full-time union
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organizers. By the late 1930s, 34th Street store managers, seeking a way to gain control of their increasingly restive workforce in a neighborhood constantly beset by street protests and strikes, accepted the union as one possible way to stabilize their situation. But the local leaders had other ideas, as the unions became an integral part of the anti-Fascist Popular Front formed in the late 1930s, gaining numerous powerful allies in the city’s radical movement. By 1941, with these allies’ support, workers at the 34th Street stores won the eight-hour day and the forty-hour week for retail workers throughout New York City.

Chapter 4 addresses the department stores and unions during World War II, when everything that had once guaranteed the union success began to disappear. The radical protests that had once dominated the streets around the stores now disappeared in favor of patriotic parades. Meanwhile, store managers began to use the stores in order to further the war effort, gaining the support of the government and the public in the process. National union leaders also found themselves increasingly in the government’s good graces, winning support for their strike against Montgomery Ward after managers there refused to grant the closed shop. For the Communists in the department store unions, the newfound strength of managers and national union leaders was a constant and unanswerable threat. The threat was made all the more serious by managers’ early efforts at restructuring the stores in an effort to deal with wartime labor shortages. Additionally, Communists’ strong support for the no-strike pledge and their conflict with national leaders led to their condemnation of the government-approved Montgomery Ward strike, damaging their relationship with the national union leaders still further. By the end of World War II, the Communists in the department store unions found themselves isolated, with less power in the national union than ever before.

Chapter 5 addresses the immediate postwar era in the department store unions’ history. In the critical period between 1946 and 1948, local and national union leaders came to an unstated agreement about what their respective roles would be within the union. The local department store union leaders gave up on any control over the national union’s policies, while national union leaders allowed the local leaders greater autonomy in the running of the local unions. This compromise did little to meet the challenges department store workers faced in the postwar era. Managers, continuing their wartime efforts at restructuring the stores, now began laying off workers in record numbers and opening branch stores in the outer boroughs and in the suburbs to appeal to the increasing numbers of suburban residents. As the layoffs mounted, the U.S. government put the Taft-Hartley Act into effect, requiring all union
officials to declare themselves non-Communists, something the local leaders could not do. By 1948 local leaders’ refusal to declare their opposition to communism attracted national attention. The leaders of New York City’s department store unions were called to testify in a set of HUAC hearings on communism in New York City’s retail trade. Shortly after the hearings concluded—and after several of the leaders of these unions pleaded the Fifth Amendment and refused to answer questions about their political beliefs—the national union leaders purged the department store locals from the CIO, establishing dual unions to compete with the Communist-led department store locals.

Chapter 6 looks at union organizers’ efforts to continue to lead and even expand the retail unions at the height of the McCarthy period, from 1948 to 1953. In these years Communist union organizers found themselves struggling with the simple tasks of retaining their leadership of the union while staying out of jail. Meanwhile, in response to the rising numbers of middle-class consumers as well as the rise of national brands and a desire to cut costs, managers began even more radical reconstruction of the stores, instituting self-service retailing, laying off still more workers, and closing some stores. With organizers struggling to stay out of jail and workers losing their jobs by the thousands, union members increasingly demanded that the union leaders move to the right politically. By the spring of 1953 the department store unions had passed resolutions condemning communism as an anti-democratic movement. In condemning communism as a grave danger to American democracy, the union leaders gained a degree of legitimacy, but they also lost the ability to challenge decisions made by the anti-Communist state without being accused of being Communists. This became critically important during the Hearn’s strike of 1953, when workers went on their first strike to challenge managers’ right to restructure the stores. When a court granted Hearn’s managers an anti-strike injunction, strikers and union leaders, still determined to prove their loyalty, strictly abided by the injunction. This decision effectively deprived union organizers of the ability to challenge managers’ restructuring programs, bringing an end to the possibilities represented by the powerful union of department store workers in New York City.
Where Labor Lost, and Why

Over the past ten years, store managers have been experimenting with even less labor-intensive forms of retailing. Beginning in the 1990s, managers at several stores, including large downscale chain stores like Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and Home Depot, began installing automated checkout counters in addition to the more traditional staffed checkout counters. Customers at these stores can now take their goods to the automated counters, scan their goods, either swipe a credit card or feed bills into the machine, place their goods in a plastic bag, and leave the store. If all goes well, it is now possible to go shopping without having any contact at all with any store workers, except perhaps for the security guards at the door. Luckily for store workers, to date these experiments have been generally unsuccessful. Frequent breakdowns and customer inexperience make the machines so inefficient that managers at a few stores have given up automated checkout counters as a complete loss. So far, according to one source, store managers have been unable to use the automated checkout machines to replace any workers, since workers must be on hand to replace the machines at a moment’s notice. Despite that, the number of machines is increasing, going from present in 6 percent of all stores in 1999 to present in 19 percent by 2002.1

The labor movement’s response has been relatively muted. In September of 2002, a reporter asked John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, about the emergence of automated checkout machines. Sweeney’s response was telling:

Sweeney . . . chuckled as he recounted the frantic phone message he received from a concerned neighbor. “Have you seen those self-check-out machines in our grocery store?” she asked the labor leader, whose federation represents 13 million union workers. . . . Sweeney’s eyes widened for effect as he quoted the caller: “What’s going to happen to all those workers?” Sweeney—who said he has not used the self-scan giz-
mos that popped up in his store last month—put his neighbor’s mind at
ease. “The union is very much aware of this,” Sweeney said, and there is
a general understanding “that no workers will be displaced as a result.”

In his confidence, Sweeney left out a few points, including the fact that many
stores using the automated checkout machines are not unionized, making
it difficult to imagine how he could guarantee that no workers would be
displaced. He also forgot his history, not remembering that CIO leaders had
made similar assurances when self-service emerged fifty years ago. With such
a lack of attention and concern, it is difficult to imagine that the labor move-
ment will reemerge in the retail sector in the near future.¹²

The American labor movement, it should be noted, continues to be rela-
tively strong in certain sectors, even some white-collar sectors such as govern-
ment jobs (where many workers are forbidden to strike, making these unions
rather ineffective). But for white-collar workers in the private sector, retailing
included, the American labor movement is virtually nonexistent, with only a
tiny fraction of these employees organized into unions. For a moment dur-
ing the Great Depression, it looked as though the American labor movement
could have been a far more powerful and representative movement, one that
had unions that represented large numbers of retail workers. For blue-collar
workers in the factories, the sit-down strikes led to permanent and relatively
powerful unions. But in retailing, the parallel sit-down strikes led to no such
result.

This study has examined both why retail workers’ unions succeeded
initially and why these unions failed in the long run. Their successes were
remarkable. New York City’s department store workers formed unions at the
largest retail stores in the world; they won the eight-hour day, significant pay
raises, and public acclaim; and they forced the CIO, dominated though it was
by notions of male blue-collar workers storming the factories, to set up a retail
workers’ union.

The successes of these unions were inherently related to communism.
Communists recognized that department store workers were, after all, part of
the working class, that these men and women deserved support in their efforts
to form unions. The Communists who organized these unions also deserve
credit for their recognition that labor struggles had to be carried on in imagi-
native and nontraditional ways. A strike had to be dynamic and inventive; it
had to take advantage of the surrounding environment, to challenge manage-
rial control wherever possible, inside the store as well as outside. The men
and women who organized New York City’s department store unions took
full advantage of these tactics. Whether at Union Square or on 34th Street, the Communists were remarkably successful at taking advantage of struggles going on around the stores. Finally, the Communists were both willing and able to create broad-based coalitions, especially in their use of cultural activities to create the Popular Front. These were important achievements for which they deserve credit.

It is important to note that Communists were responsible for these achievements, not the Communist party. In many respects, in fact, the Communist party almost limited the unions’ successes. Gussie Reed’s letter to Michelson, for instance, and the narrow interpretation of Communist policy that it represented, could have had major effects on the unions’ future had Michelson not chosen to ignore Reed’s instructions. In addition, and perhaps even more important, at the height of the attacks on the union in the early 1950s, the Communist leaders of the unions decided to follow Party policy and engage workers in a debate about American foreign policy and the Korean War, rather than focusing on the rise of self-service retailing and the massive numbers of layoffs. It should be noted, however, that there is little evidence that they lost department store workers’ support due to their following of Russian policy in the 1940s and early 1950s, as other historians have claimed happened with Communists in other sectors of the labor movement. In fact, the moment it seemed possible that union leaders would wholly lose workers’ support by following such policies, Communist union leaders split with the CP and adopted an anti-Communist line.

The Communist party was hardly the most important factor limiting the successes of Communists. There were other issues that the unions never successfully confronted, most important among them race and gender. The alliances the unions formed had extremely surprising racial limits. Had the unions been willing to ally with the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns, for instance, they might have found themselves part of an even more powerful movement, one that challenged understandings not only of class, but of the racial divide that continues to plague the labor movement in many industries. Instead, they ignored these movements, for the most part adopting a relatively conservative understanding of the importance of a labor union, which held that the union was designed to protect workers already employed, not to worry about who was being employed. As a result, racial segregation—whether in the city or in the stores—faced only a few fleeting challenges from the department store unions.

An equally serious limit of Communist leadership was the Communists’ fleeting commitment to women’s equality within the unions. While certainly
the leaders of the department store unions gave lip service to women's rights and recognized that women workers could and should form unions, the fact remains that little effort was made to encourage women workers to take leadership roles in these unions, and women's response to the cheesecake photographs in the union paper in the late 1940s indicates that they felt their roles within the union were limited in the extreme.

The ultimate failure of retail workers' unions in America, however, was the result not of these limits of the unions' leadership, important though those limits are, but rather of three interlocking historical developments. The first was the rise of anti-communism. Anti-communism led to the destruction of the coalitions that had served the unions so well in their early struggles. Just as important, it meant the destruction of the CIO's retail workers' union, the RWDSU. Anti-communism also gave employers a valuable weapon during strikes. It would severely weaken the unions, leaving them isolated and vulnerable. Closely linked to anti-communism, the rise of the middle class meant that the white-collar workers who had once played so important a role in the unions' struggles had now disappeared into the suburbs or into developments like Parkchester and Stuyvesant Town, ceasing to accept that they had anything to do with unions or, indeed, with workers. The third of these developments was the transformation of American consumption, particularly the rise of self-service retailing. Once self-service retailing was introduced, stores could function with casual and easily replaceable labor, a difficult group of workers to organize. With stores that relied on this sort of labor, the collapse of the national union, and the disappearance of their allies, further union organizing in retail stores was nearly impossible.

It was the combination of these factors during the Hearn's strike that meant the final blow against New York City's department store unions. The government stepped in and declared that managers had a right to make profits through instituting self-service, and that unions had no right to interfere in that process through picket lines. This decision was momentous not only in its content, but also in its context. Certainly it was not unique; judges had issued similar injunctions during the unions' very first strikes at Klein's and Ohrbach's. But with union leaders and members clinging to the hope that the coalition formed around liberal anti-communism would adequately replace the coalitions once formed around communism, the injunction during the Hearn's strike took on a different meaning entirely. To violate the government's order would have meant adopting a radical, not a liberal, response. And to do so while attempting to fend off accusations that their liberal anti-communism was a sham was nearly impossible. To the leaders of the union as well as to
their allies, anti-communism meant respect for the government's rulings, even when those rulings were against workers' interests. The strike ended in defeat, and with that defeat ended any chance of preventing the transformation of retail work.

The history of these retail workers' unions must be integrated into our larger understandings of the history of the labor movement during the CIO era. Historians who use male blue-collar workers to represent the history of the CIO allow the roles of communism and anti-communism in American history to remain underanalyzed. Male blue-collar workers were critical both to the CIO's success and to its representation throughout the union's history, but historians have all too frequently allowed them to stand in for the entire CIO workforce, including the CIO's advances in retailing only as a minor and peripheral anecdote. But the peripheral nature of unions in the retail field was itself a result of specific historical events. Without understanding these events, we fall far too easily into thinking that retail workers are fundamentally more difficult to organize than are workers in manufacturing or construction, or—even more tragically—we forget about the existence of retail workers' unions altogether. To do so represents a dangerous historical fallacy. Retail workers could and did form powerful and lasting unions given the correct historical circumstances. For a moment in the 1930s those circumstances existed: workers found leaders with diverse political and tactical approaches, and with strong connections to other social movements. Managerial restructuring and the concurrent rise of anti-communism in the late 1940s and early 1950s brought this historical moment to an end, crippling the American labor movement in the process.

Now, at the turn of the twenty-first century, there are few hopeful signs for the future of the American labor movement in the retail industry. Certainly John Sweeney's reported chuckle was not really warranted under the circumstances. In their 2003–4 strikes, the United Food and Commercial Workers took on the grocery industry in Southern California, and lost, as store managers used the threat of Wal-Mart openings and store closings to justify cutting benefits to a hesitant public. The UFCW's defeat in the Southern California strike, the largest retail workers' strike in American history, does not bode well for the future of the American labor movement. Until and unless union organizers figure out a way to recapture some of the dynamic radicalism and solidarity that characterized the 1930s labor movement, unions in American retailing—and indeed, in America as a whole—will remain ineffective, little more than fading shadows of the mass organizations they once were.
NOTES

Introduction


3. For one historian’s interpretation of labor’s failure to organize more retail workers, see Tami J. Friedman, “The Workers Aren’t Nontraditional—But The Strategy Should Be,” Dollars and Sense (September/October 2002), 8.


7. For a good summary of the new labor history argument, see James Green,


Chapter 1


3. Matthew Josephson, *Infidel In The Temple: A Memoir of the Nineteen-Thirties* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 126–27. Jacob Stein, interviewed by B. Hathaway [Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, WPA Federal Writers’ Project Collection (hereafter FWP Collection)], December 27, 1938. See also Wayne Walden, “Conversations In A Park” (FWP Collection), October 24, 1938, and Arnold Eagle, “Man With Newspaper at Political Discussion Meeting, Union Square,” undated photograph, “Union Square—Park And General 2/2 (Photos)” folder, Museum of the City of New York Archives (hereafter MCNY). While all of these sources indicate (it seems accurately) that most of the participants in these discussions were working-class men, women participated as well; see both Gertrude Reiss, interviewed by author, Brooklyn, NY, November 30, 2000 (hereafter Gertrude Reiss interview), and Arnold Eagle, “Men and Women in Discussion, Union Square,” “Union Square—Park And General 2/2 (Photos)” folder, MCNY.

4. Reiss interview.


6. For the street peddlers, see Halper, *Good-bye, Union Square*, 79, and Arnold Eagle, “Female Street Vendor At Union Square,” Undated Photograph, “Union Square—Park and General 2/2 (Photos)” folder, MCNY. For the importance of Klein’s and Ohrbach’s, see Robert Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of America’s Great Department Stores* (New York: Stein And Day, 1979), 443–45. See also Herman Kirschbaum, interviewed by B. Hathaway (FWP Collection), September 1938-January 1939. For the quotation, see Reiss interview. For the effects of the Depression on Klein’s in particular, see “S. Klein: On-The-Square Store Plays Santa to Its Employees,” *Newsweek* (December 29, 1934), 29.


11. For the May Day march, see “Workers Line Both Sides Of Streets Despite Heavy Downpour in New York,” Daily Worker (May 2, 1932), 1. For the formation of the Union Square Association, see “Form Union Square Group,” New York Times (May 13, 1932), 35. There is no record of any activity conducted by the Union Square Association after its founding.


13. “‘Frontier’ On Union Square! (But Not For Us: We Put It In Shops),” Daily Worker (June 20, 1930), 1. For more details on the Veterans of Foreign Wars parade, see Thompson, “Patriotism and Protest,” 155–56.


15. Most, but not all, scholars of the Depression have agreed that these years are best characterized as years of social and economic upheaval, resulting in the New Deal. The most important dissenter is Melvyn Dubofsky, “Not So ‘Turbulent Years’: Another Look at the American 1930s,” Amerikastudien/American Studies, 24 (1979), 5–20. Scholars who have, more or less, agreed that the Depression represented a time of upheaval which was met by the New Deal include Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail (New York: Vintage Books, 1979 [Paperback Edition]), 41–180.


17. For the shoppers in Union Square, see Haicken interview, Papa interview, and Reiss interview. Reiss, who lived in Brooklyn at the time, never worked in the stores but did support work during the strike, and remembered shopping at Klein's and Ohrbach's frequently. Papa, who lived in the Bronx, also remembered shopping at the two stores, particularly Ohrbach's, which she said had even nicer clothes, but remembered these shopping trips as special occasions rather than weekly or even monthly occurrences. For Klein's profits, see “S. Klein: On-The-Square Store Plays Santa,” 29. For the high quality of the merchandise available at Klein's, see Elmer Rice, Minority Report: An Autobiography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 257

18. Halper, Good-bye, Union Square, 100.


20. For the close supervision and the responsibility to catch shoplifters, see Leane Zugsmith, A Time to Remember (New York: Random House, 1936), 60; further discussion of Zugsmith's relationship to the unions will be provided in later chapters. For the ethnic ties between customers and workers, see Haicken interview. For the number of store workers at Klein's and Ohrbach's (there were 1200 at Klein's, and 1400 at Ohrbach's), see “S. Klein: On-The-Square Store Plays Santa,” 28, and “Girl Striker Heckles LaGuardia; Chained to Box, Foils Ejection, New York Times (January 21, 1935), “Clippings” File, DSSO Papers.


24. Ohrbach, *Getting Ahead In Retailing*, 62–65, 101–2. For Julia Jacobs, see “S. Klein: On-The-Square Store Plays Santa,” 29. For the ethnicity of the workers, and for women as the overwhelmingly majority of Klein’s and Ohrbach’s employees (as well as the majority of the strikers), see Ormsby, “The Other Side of the Profile,” and Haicken interview.


29. Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 187–89; 196; Ormsby, “The Other Side of the Profile,” 21; for slightly later opening hours at Ohrbach’s, see “Ohrbach Employees To Share In Profits,” *New York Times* (June 17, 1930), 52; for the forty-hour week as a crucial strike demand, see “Department Store Strike Front,” *Working Woman* (February 1935), 3.

30. Ormsby, “The Other Side of the Profile,” 21. See also Office of War Information, Untitled Photograph [S. Klein’s, trying on dresses], Museum of the City of New York, gift of the Department of Local Government, Public Record Office of South Australia.

31. The change may not have been as dramatic as these figures suggest; this second study, it should be noted, did not include temporary workers in calculating the turnover numbers, while approximately one-fourth of the store managers who participated in the first study did include temporary and seasonal employees in reporting their numbers. Nonetheless, O. Preston Robinson, a specialist in department store per-
sonnel relations and Associate Professor of Retailing at New York University’s School of Retailing, did claim that “economic conditions” during the Depression tended to reduce labor turnover. For the first study, see O. Preston Robinson, “Labor Turnover In New York Metropolitan Stores,” Journal of Retailing (October 1930), 88; for the 1936 statistics, as well as Robinson’s interpretation of the change, see Robinson, Retail Personnel Relations (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), 361–63.

32. For a worker who left retailing altogether after a brief stint in Ohrbach’s, see Anne Haicken interview. For one who moved from these stores into a career within the upscale stores, see Irving Fajans, interviewed by May Swenson (February 1, 1939), FWP Collection (hereafter Fajans interview).


39. Ruth Pinkson, interviewed by author, Garret Park, Maryland, March 10, 2000 (hereafter Pinkson interview).


42. For one discussion of women in unions and strikes, see “Department Store Strike Front,” Working Woman (February 1935), 3.


44. See “Editorials,” Office Worker (February 1935), 2; for the age of OWU members and strikers in particular, see also Arnold Honig, “The Klein-Ohrbach Strikes,” Office Worker (February 1935), 3, “Clippings,” DSSO Collection. Much of the information on gender and the OWU is taken from or confirmed by Pinkson interview. While Pinkson did suggest that men tended to be “macho” even within the OWU, she also observed that it was to a lesser extent than in the United Office and Professional Workers of America, where she worked as a West Coast organizer a few years later.

45. Pinkson interview; “Gigantic Demonstration in Union Square,” Office Worker (May 1933), 1; see also Charles Rivers, “May Day March, New York, 1935,” Photograph, “Union Square—Park And General 2/2 (Photos)” folder, MCNY.

46. Clarina Michelson, interviewed by Debra Bernhardt, New York, October 20, 1979 (hereafter Clarina Michelson interview). For her participation in the LSNR, which was not covered in her interview, see LSNR stationery and “Fight Discrimination Against Negro Workers!” flyer, both in Clarina Michelson Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, and “To All Store and Office Workers on 125th Street, Negro and White!” flyer, Clarina Michelson Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.


49. For the economic pressures faced by strikers and scabs alike, see Ann Barton, “Home Life,” Pinkson interview confirms this, as does Zugsmith’s description of Aline. For the anti-picketing writ, see “125 Pickets Seized At Ohrbach Store,”

50. Leane Zugsmith, A Time to Remember, 211–13. It is possible that Zugsmith decided to use a theatrical scene after seeing a play about the strike; there was, at least according to one source, a play about the Klein’s-Ohrbach’s strikes being produced off-Broadway by the Theatre Collective. So far, neither copies nor detailed descriptions of the play have been found. For the single citation referring to the play, see Irving Bernstein, A Caring Society: The New Deal, the Worker, and the Great Depression: A History of the American Worker, 1933–1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 219.

51. For the term “monkey business,” see Clarina Michelson interview and Ruth Pinkson interview. Anne Haicken, somewhat curiously, did not remember the term, although she remembered participating in some of the actions which Michelson and Pinkson referred to as “monkey business.”


54. Undated paper, “Early Strikes” file, DSSO Collection; Pinkson interview.

55. Pinkson interview. For the FAECT, see “Editorials,” Office Worker (February 1935), 2; for the mice, see “Ohrbach Asks New Writ To Bar All Picketing By Striking Employees,” Daily Worker (February 1, 1935), “Clippings,” DSSO Papers.

56. Clarina Michelson interview

57. Pinkson interview.


60. Leane Zugsmith, A Time To Remember, 288–89. For the arrests, see also Reiss interview.

61. Clarina Michelson interview


63. “125 Pickets Seized At Ohrbach Store;” Clarina Michelson interview. For the
Notes to Chapter 2

arrest, but not the applause, see “9 ‘Sailors of Cattaro’ Give Matinee in Police Station,” New York World-Telegram (February 9, 1935), 1.

64. For Gypsy Rose Lee and Lillian Hellman at the meeting, the only source—surprisingly—is Pinkson interview, but both women had links to the left, and therefore might have come to speak in support of the strikers. Hellman, a committed radical, was involved with the League of Women Shoppers, a consumer support group which will be discussed further in chapter 2; for Hellman’s involvement, see Clarina Michelson interview. Though less prominent in radical circles, Gypsy Rose Lee did support other left-wing causes; for this, see Sam Sills, “Abraham Lincoln Brigade,” in Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, eds., Encyclopedia of the American Left (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 3.

65. Arnold Honig, “The Klein-Ohrbach Strikes,” Office Worker (February 1935), 3; Zugsmith, A Time To Remember, 266.


67. This quotation is given in “Girl Striker Heckles La Guardia; Chained to Box, Foils Ejection,” New York Times (January 21, 1935), “Clippings,” DSSO Collection, and “Ohrbach Feast Spoiled By Two Comely Pickets Voicing Strike Demands.”

68. Pinkson interview, Haicken interview. Anne Haicken was one of the two workers chained to the balcony.

69. “Girl Striker Heckles La Guardia; Chained to Box, Foils Ejection.”

70. “Ohrbach Feast Spoiled By Two Comely Pickets Voicing Strike Demands;” Pinkson interview.

71. “Girl Striker Heckles La Guardia; Chained to Box, Foils Ejection;” “Ohrbach Feast Spoiled By Two Comely Pickets Voicing Strike Demands.”


73. Labor Research Association, “Some White Collar and Professional Workers’ Strikes, 1934 to date” (March 19, 1936), 4, DSSO Collection.

74. “Hands Off!” Office Worker (April 1935), 6. For the layoffs, see also Pinkson interview. The second Ohrbach’s strike and the controversy surrounding its settlement will be discussed further in chapter 2.

75. For corruption in the RCIPA, see Clarina Michelson interview, as well as chapter 2 of this study.

76. Frederick Woltman (World-Telegram Staff Writer), “Retail Clerks Remove Denise, East Organizer,” World Telegram [?], Undated, “Clippings” folder, DSSO Papers. Denise was removed as East Coast organizer late in 1935; see Kirstein, Stores and Unions, 59.

77. Clarina Michelson interview.

Chapter 2


3. For the history of May’s see “Over 12 Million in 22 Years Is Story Of Mays, Brooklyn,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 10, 1946), 63.


5. See Affidavit of Pearl Edison (October 29, 1935), 1 and Affidavit of Evelyn Cohen (October 29, 1935), 1.

6. “Report of Findings of the Mayor’s Committee Appointed to Investigate the Strike at the May’s Department Store, 510 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, New York,” (March 12, 1936), LaGuardia Papers, Reel 230 (hereafter “May’s Strike Report”), 2; both Rivers, “The Law Was Aimed At Gangsters,” 5; and Miriam Birge Wise and Jess P. Lacklen, Jr., *Unionization in the Retail Field* (New York: New York University School of Retailing, 1940), 7, confirm this sequence of events.

7. “May’s Strike Pickets Beaten By The Police,” *Daily Worker* (February 24, 1936), 3; see also Fajans interview.

8. “Memo From Borough Headquarters (Brooklyn and Richmond) To Police Commissioner, February 14, 1936,” 1–2; La Guardia Papers, Reel 230. For the Artists’ League and other rallies, see Testimony of Thomas A. Swift (rep., Downtown Brooklyn Association), Joint Legislative Committee on Industrial and Labor Conditions, *Public Hearing on Cross-Picketing* (New York, NY; December 5, 1941) [hereafter *Cross-Picketing Hearing*], 104.

9. For the LWS’s founding, see Clarina Michelson interview. For the members of the LWS, see for example, League of Women Shoppers, Letter to Fiorello LaGuardia, dated February 14, 1936), 1, LaGuardia Papers, Reel 230. Many of these women chose to use their husbands’ names on the LWS stationery; I have allowed these names to stand unaltered.

10. The strongest piece of propaganda portraying retail workers as white-collar workers was Leane Zugsmith’s *A Time to Remember,* which was published during the May’s strike. For the LWS’s claim that they had no class affiliations, see “Use Your Buying Power For Justice,” undated leaflet, “Publications Relating to the League of Women Shoppers,” Vertical File, Tamiment Library, New York University.

11. Letter from Gussie Reed, dated August 21, 1935, in Michelson Papers, Box 3, Folder 20.

12. For police beatings during the strike, see Petition to Mayor LaGuardia
(December 14, 1935), 1. Michelson remembered Thomas's arrest, but erroneously claimed that it occurred during the Klein's-Ohrbach's strikes; see Clarina Michelson interview. For Thomas's arrest during the May's strike, see League of Women Shoppers, Letter to Fiorello LaGuardia (February 14, 1936), 1, LaGuardia Papers, Reel 230. For May's gifts to the Democratic Party, see “May's Store Accused; It and Restaurant Made Illegal Party Gifts, Blanchard Says,” New York Times (May 21, 1936), 18. For the listening device, see “Pickets Cases Cause Dispute In Court,” New York Times (December 24, 1935), 21.

13. For the singling out of individual picketers for arrest, see “May's Strike Report,” 14. For the captain's statement, see LWS, Report On The May's Strike From Observers Miriam Rivers and Josephine Wertheim, LaGuardia Papers, Reel 230; May's Strike Report, 15–16.

14. “May's Strike Pickets Beaten By The Police,” Daily Worker (February 24, 1936), 3; May's Strike Report, 26; for store managers' response, see “Response to May's Strike Committee Report” (March 20, 1936), LaGuardia Papers, Reel 230.

15. For the truck drivers, see Ruth Prince Mack, Ph.D., Controlling Retailers: A Study of Cooperation and Control in the Retail Trade With Special Reference to the NRA (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 482–83 (n. 101).

16. For Goodman's background, see “Trial Board Minutes,” Meeting of October 12, 1936, 6, “Department Store Employees Union, Local 1250 (RCIPA)—Ohrbach's—Ben Goodman Case, 1936” folder, DSSO Papers.


19. For the transfer of the strike, see “Union Support Is Now Denied May’s Strikers,” Telegram (July 2, 1936), “Local 1250—Newspaper Clippings” Folder, DSSO Papers, and “Trial Board Minutes,” 6. Elsie Monokian, the May’s worker whose firing led to the strike, was present at the trial documented in these minutes, suggesting that at least some workers at May’s were unwilling to sever their ties with Local 1250. For Local 1125’s support for the national RCIPA leaders, see “Rioting Marks Retail Clerks’ ‘New Era’ Parley,” Women’s Wear Daily (February 19, 1937), 1, 20.


21. For Carnes' participation in the 1936 Ohrbach’s strike, see Eleanor Tillson, “United Storeworkers and RWDSU” (unpublished manuscript, 1982), “RWDSU—Local 3,” Vertical File, Tamiment Library; Tillson interviewed Carnes about the union's history. Carnes was also present at Benjamin Goodman's trial, discussed further below. See “Trial Board Minutes,” 1.

22. Michelson provides a chronology of these events during Goodman's trial; see “Trial Board Minutes,” 8. See also the petition by Ohrbach's strikers in this same folder in protest to Goodman's actions, and “Picketing is Ended at Ohrbach Store,” Women’s Wear Daily (October 5, 1936), 14.

23. See again “Trial Board Minutes,” 8. Goodman also sent a copy of his com-
plaints to LaGuardia; see Letter from Goodman to Fiorello LaGuardia (October 5, 1936), La Guardia Papers, Reel 115.

24. While the trial board was strongly predisposed against Goodman, the fact that every striker signed a petition supporting the board’s findings suggests that workers did not feel that they had been “sold out,” as Goodman claimed. Considering Michelson’s close connection with these workers, and Goodman’s lack of participation in the strike, this is not surprising. It is perhaps a mark of that closeness that the workers—without Michelson present—voted to spend part of the money from the settlement on a watch for Michelson. The full distribution of the settlement money was as follows: $230 for every worker who had walked the picket line (and two-thirds of that for those who had honored the picket line but had left the picketing to others), $560 to the lawyers; $25 to the union’s bail fund, $75 for a banquet for the strikers, $2 for the union funds, and the remainder for a watch, which they gave as a present to Michelson; see “Trial Board Minutes,” 4.

25. See Letter from Ben Davis on The Negro Liberator stationery, dated April 27, 1935 to the Committee of Unemployed Office, Store and Professional Workers, Clarina Michelson Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.


28. For Wolchok’s claim, see George Meisler, interviewed by Debra Bernhardt (New York, December 12, 1979 and December 21, 1979), hereafter Meisler interview. Irving Simon, a longtime ally of Wolchok’s (which Meisler was not), said in 1939 that Wolchok had received his scars to wrest control of the union from the “underworld,” rather than from Communists. Unfortunately, more research would need to be done on Wolchok and on the union struggles in the grocery industry before any definitive account of where Wolchok got his scars can be provided. For Simon’s statement, see Proceedings—Second Biennial Convention, URWEA (December 11–14, 1939 [hereafter Second Convention Proceedings]), 109.

29. For the various fronts that the CP called for, see Klehr, The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade.

30. See Meisler interview.


34. “Barbara Buys Historic Gems for $1,200,000,” LA Times (June 17, 1936), 1.

35. Michael Gold, Jews Without Money (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1996), 217. Hammett, of course, would also join the Communist party later in the 1930s, but there is no indication that he did so before 1936; at the time of the writing of The
Thin Man, he remained politically independent and generally inactive. See also Paula E. Hyman, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 129–30.


39. Daughters, 274–76.

40. Ruth Gikow, “As A Woolworth Worker and Artist Views Her Job,” Daily Worker (March 31, 1937), 5; Harry Raymond, “Girl Clerks Sit Tight in 4 ‘Five and Tens’ on 2nd Day of Tieup,” Daily Worker (March 15, 1937), 1, 4; and Papa interview.


44. “Woolworth Girl Sitdowners Win Demands in Detroit Stores,” Daily Worker (March 6, 1937), 4. See also Frank, “Girl Strikers.”


47. For Green’s support, see “Green Letter Shelved In NY AFL Council,” Daily Worker (March 19, 1937), 1. For the early days of the strikes and the numbers of supporters, see Clarina Michelson, “Five-and-Dime,” Woman Today (May 1937), 9–10, as well as Clarina Michelson interview and Meisler interview.


50. “Woolworth Girls on Hunger Strike,” 1, and Clarina Michelson interview.
51. Clarina Michelson interview.
56. “We Shall Not Be Moved,’ Sing Girl Sit-In Strikers,” Daily Worker (March 16, 1937), 3. For the demand of a boycott of German-made goods, see “Woolworth Union Asks Nazi Boycott,” New York Post (March 18, 1937), 15.
59. Raymond, “Girl Clerks Sit Tight In 4 ‘Five And Tens’ on 2nd Day of Tieup,” 1. For the estimated ages of workers at five-and-dime stores, see Papa interview.
60. “Woolworth Girls Strike In 2 Stores,” New York Times (March 18, 1937), 1, 6; see also Clarina Michelson interview.
61. The lyrics to the song are reprinted in “They Sing While They Sit,” Daily Worker (March 4, 1937), 3. Michelson remembered the chant; see Clarina Michelson interview.
64. See Karen Plunkett-Powell, Remembering Woolworth’s: A Nostalgic History of the World’s Most Famous Five-and-Dime (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 222–23. Though Plunkett-Powell claims that Hutton sold off all of her Woolworth’s stock, this may be an exaggeration on her part. After a massive stock sale in 1926, when her guardians sold off nearly half her stock in one fell swoop, Hutton still retained almost 100,000 shares of Woolworth’s common stock, and there are no records of additional stock sales after 1926. Whether Hutton retained those 100,000 shares or not, however, Hutton held only a small percentage of the total Woolworth’s stock after 1926. For the sale of Hutton’s stock, see “Stock Sale Brings $10,000,000 To Girl,” New York Times (January 9, 1926), 1, and “Private Sale of 50,000 Woolworth,” Wall Street Journal (January 9, 1926), 1.


69. John L. Lewis, Letter to Samuel Walckor [sic], (May 19, 1937), CIO Collection, Box 9, Folder 12, CUAA. Somewhat surprisingly, Steven Fraser’s often excellent *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 345–46, offers a misleading chronology of these events, suggesting that the department store union’s merger with the CIO led to the five-and-dime sit-down strikes.


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**Chapter 3**


5. Ibid., 107.


10. For the Macy’s advertisements, see “Latest Retail Selling Slants,” *Women's Wear Daily* (September 18, 1936), 2.
15. For managers’ attempts to regulate workers’ appearances, a factor in both upscale and downscale stores, see chapter 1, note 25.
16. For the variety of workers in an upscale department store, see Agreement Between Gimbel Brothers, Inc. and CIO, URWDSEA, and Gimbel Local 2, Dated November 24, 1941 (effective as of September 12, 1941), Appendix A and Appendix B, Folder 18, Box 9, CIO Papers, Catholic University of America Archives (hereafter CUAA).
18. For the stores’ customers, see Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 76–77. For store workers, see note 20.
19. Fajans interview. Betty Mindling, “A Shopgirl’s Saga,” from unnamed union publication, given to WPA interviewer by Michelson. This motive for joining the union is confirmed by Annette Rubinstein, interviewed by author, New York, NY, November 13, 2000 (hereafter Rubinstein interview). Rubinstein knew a number of department store workers quite well and later became active in the department store unions during the Gimbel’s strike.
newsletter, is almost certainly wrong, since one article mentions the CIO and the name of John Cooney, a UREA official; neither Cooney nor the CIO was involved with Macy’s until 1937, a more probable date for this issue.) For lunch and working hours, see also Boyd, “Early Years,” 5. The rushed schedule was confirmed by Spadavecchio interview. For the bureaucracy, see Shirley Jackson, “My Life with R.H. Macy,” in The Lottery and Other Stories (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 57.

23. The average salary of $15 a week is from Beth McHenry, “Worker Tires, Macy’s Fires,” Daily Worker (March 6, 1937), 7. For the vacation house, see Spadavecchio interview; and “Macy’s Buys New Employee Camp Site,” Women’s Wear Daily (July 3, 1944), 15. While he does not mention the upstate vacation house, Boyd confirms the Thanksgiving turkey; see Boyd, “Early Years,” 2. For the Greater New York Department Store Baseball League, see “President of O. And P. League Dead,” New York Times (May 30, 1910), 13. For the dramatic clubs, see “‘Retail Follies of 1939’ A Lively Opening Bill,” Women’s Wear Daily (January 17, 1939), 12.

24. “We Made Macy’s Answer,” Main Floor News (December 1934), 2; Beth McHenry, “Worker Tires, Macy’s Fires; “Macy’s Public Enemy #1—MMAA,” Main Floor News [Undated], 1; see also May Swenson, “Lore of Department Store Workers,” FWP Collection; for the specific complaints about how money was being spent, see “Unadvertised Specials: Hospital Malady,” Macy Unionizer (misdated; see note 22), 2–3, “Macy Unionizer—CIO” Folder, DSSO Papers.

25. For the searches, see “Macy’s Frisks Its Employees,” Main Floor News [Undated], 1, “OWU—Department Store Section—Macy Local—Leaflets” Folder, DSSO Papers; for the money spent on security versus the money lost to shoplifting, see “1250 Organizer,” [First Issue—Undated], 1, “DSEU (CIO)—Local 1250—1250 Organizer” Folder, DSSO Papers. Spadavecchio also remembered having to leave her belongings in lockers throughout the day.


32. For the numbers in May 1937, see Letter from New Era Retail Sales Clerks Unions of America to John L. Lewis (dated May 15, 1937); for the union’s status in December, see “First Convention of Retail Workers Plans Vast Drive,” Retail Employee (December 18, 1937), 1. Retail Employee was the UREA’s official newspaper; during these early years, every issue of the eight-page Retail Employee contained at least one full page entitled “New York City,” which covered some of the news of the New York City locals; other locations where the union grew—such as West Virginia, Philadelphia, and Michigan—generally received half or a quarter of a page.

34. Samuel Wolchok, Letter to John L. Lewis (dated September 1, 1937), 1–2; Box 9, Folder 13, CIO Collection, CUAA.

35. Lewis, Memorandum For [Walter] Smethurst (dated July 30 1937), Box 9, Folder 12, CIO Collection, CUAA.

36. For Lewis’s strong support of Wolchok, see John V. Cooney, “Acceptance Speech,” First Convention Minutes, 3; for Lewis’s telegram to Wolchok, see “Lewis Congratulates Wolchok On New Gimbel’s Contract,” Retail Employee (March 1938), 1.

37. Samuel Wolchok, Memorandum to CIO (dated 1 October 1937), 3–4, Box 9, Folder 13, CIO Collection, CUAA.

38. Samuel Wolchok, Letter to Philip Murray (dated November 10, 1937), Box 9, Folder 13, CIO Collection, CUAA; see also Second Convention Proceedings, 56.

39. Minutes of the First National Convention of the UREA held at the Webster Hall Hotel in the City of Pittsburgh (hereafter First Convention Minutes), 4.

40. For references to the various accolades Wolchok received, see “Elect Wolchok Official of New York CIO;” CIO News—Retail Wholesale Edition (October 8, 1938), 1; “Samuel Wolchok Invited to International Labor Congress,” Retail Employee (April 15, 1938), 1.

41. For Broido’s insistence upon negotiating with Wolchok, see William Michelson, interviewed by Debra Bernhardt, New York, NY, January 15, 1981, Tamiment Library, New York University (hereafter William Michelson interview). Broido, during his 1948 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, denied being a friend of Wolchok’s, but the two had at least gotten along fairly well, since Broido had appeared at a banquet in Wolchok’s honor. See “Wolchok Honored With Histadrut Dinner,” Retail Wholesale and Department Store Employee (May 1947), 3; for Business Week’s praise of Wolchok, see “Rise of Store Employees’ Union,” Business Week (January 1, 1938), 16–17.

42. First Convention Minutes, 4.

43. First Convention Minutes, page g. The delegate is not named.


45. Clarina Michelson interview.

46. Like most department store union leaders, Loring never publicly admitted party membership. William Michelson later recalled that the department store local leaders, of whom Loring had certainly been one, had all been united by radical politics, except for Kovenetsky; see William Michelson interview. For Kovenetsky’s emergence as a leader, see Boyd, “Early Years,” 48, 71.

47. For William Michelson’s involvement in radical politics, see especially William Michelson interview. Though some accounts suggest that the two were not related, in this interview William Michelson said that he was a distant cousin of Clarina Michelson’s. At other times, however, he denied such a relationship; see particularly his testimony before the United States House of Representatives, Investigation of Communism in New York Distributive Trades, Special Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 80th Congress, Second Session, Pursuant to House Resolution 1111, U.S. Government Printing

48. “Employees Negotiate At Bloomingdale Department Store,” Retail Employee (November 5, 1938), 1, 9; “Bloomingdale Department Store Signs Contract,” Retail Employee (December 12, 1938), 1. Bloomingdale's is a little difficult to pinpoint as far as the question of whether it was upscale or downscale. Certainly, considering its less than ideal location, it was not as prestigious a store as Gimbel's and Macy's; at the same time, managers there practiced full-service retailing, denying customers access to goods, and charging higher prices than one might have paid at the 14th Street stores. For Bloomingdale's history, see Marvin Traub, Like No Other Store . . . : The Bloomingdale's Legend and the Revolution in American Marketing (New York: Crown, 1993).


50. Very little is known about Morris, since he died only a few years after becoming the business manager of Local 3; his connections with the CP are mostly an inference, based on later developments in the union’s history and the high regard in which other radical leaders seemed to hold him. For Morris’s work in the cafeteria and his left-wing politics, see Kirstein, Stores and Unions, 79. There is more evidence of Brown’s Communist politics, which will be presented in later chapters.

51. Clarina Michelson interview; William Michelson interview; Bea Schwartz, interviewed by Debra Bernhardt, New York, May 14, 1980 and May 17, 1980 (hereafter Schwartz interview); Maxwell Schneider, “I Met Bill Michelson When He Said: Let’s Organize!” Department Store Employee (March 9, 1946), 1.

52. See Boyd, “Early Years,” 44. For local leaders’ interpretations of these events, see Marcella Loring Michelson, interviewed by Debra Bernhardt, New York, NY, June 18, 1980, Tamiment Library, New York University (hereafter Loring interview), Meisler interview. Since having separate locals gave the radicals more votes, there was a minor contradiction here, but organizers nonetheless strongly argued that both the one-vote-per-local policy and breaking up the unions into separate locals weakened the union, both creating divisions between them while still giving them less representation than they felt they deserved considering that their unions were far larger than any of the other locals.

53. Meisler interview.

54. Atkinson interview.

55. See Clarina Michelson interview. She believed Alexander’s to be one of the union’s most serious defeats, because, as she pointed out, their failure to organize the store in the 1930s meant that the store would never be unionized.

56. William Michelson interview; Loring interview; Kovenetsky interview. No information is available on whether Sadka Brown or Lowell Morris viewed sales as a career. See also Pinkson interview; Haicken interview; Fajans interview; Spadavecchio interview. For turnover as a somewhat minor factor in the upscale stores, see “Job Stability Held to Create Store Problem,” Women’s Wear Daily (May 25, 1939), 1, 35.

57. “Bloomingdale Girls’ Team Breaks Jinx,” and “Upsets Mark Hoop League,” The CIO News, Retail Edition (February 29, 1940), 9. For the swimming programs, see
“Gala Opening—Swim-Gym” Flyer, Dated October 11 (no year given), “Department Store Employees’ Union (CIO)—Local 1250” Folder, DSSO Papers.

58. See “Gimbel Union’s New Library Proves Popular” and “Forum Discusses Marriage,” CIO News—Retail Edition (February 29, 1940), 9; for the parties and choral group see “Organizing On A Spree,” 1250 Organizer (First Issue, Undated), 1, Department Store Employees Union (CIO) Local 1250—1250 Organizer Folder,” DSSO Papers. Both quotes are taken from “Organizing on a Spree.”

59. “Sing And Be Happy” Booklet, printed by Local 1250 Song Shop, Undated, “Department Store Employees Union—Local 1250 (no indication AFL or CIO)” folder, DSSO Papers; though undated, the address of Local 1250’s offices make it clear that this booklet was printed during the CIO years.

60. For Vallee’s performance, see “Come To Our Grand Victory Ball” Flyer (dated Saturday, May 8 [1937?]), “Department Store Employees Union (no affiliation indicated)” Folder, DSSO Papers.

61. “Meet the Girls Behind the Counter at the Counter Carnival,” flyer, “DSEU-Local 1250 (no indication AFL or CIO)” folder, DSSO Papers.


63. For Macy’s role in the World’s Fair, see “Macy’s Subscribes For $468,000 Fair Bonds,” Women’s Wear Daily (January 11, 1937), 19.


65. “Progress, Movement Key Windows of Herald Square to Fair’s Tempo,” Women’s Wear Daily (May 1, 1939), 2; Donald L. Pratt, “S. Klein Plans ‘No Fancy Stuff,’ But He’ll Be Ready for Fair Crowds,” Women’s Wear Daily (March 31, 1939), 7.


67. For the planning of Parkchester, see Minutes of Special Housing Meeting Held at Offices of Mr. Gove, Thursday, March 31, 1938, in Parkchester: Minutes of Meetings—Board of Design, 3–4, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York, NY. See also “Low Cost Housing Without U.S. Aid Shown By Ecker,” Wall Street Journal (July 7, 1939), 1; “Model of Housing Displayed At Fair,” New York Times (May 5, 1939), 47; and Zim, Lerner, and Rolfe, The World of Tomorrow, 66.


70. “Macy Branch To Open,” *New York Times* (October 12, 1941), 54.


72. For the closing of Macy’s Syracuse branch, see “R.H. Macy To Close Store In Syracuse,” *New York Times* (December 27, 1941), 29, and “Macy’s to Close Store in Syracuse Tomorrow,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (December 26, 1941), 1.


76. At least two different explanations exist for Michelson’s departure. Ruth Pinkson claims that Michelson’s husband, Andrew Overgaard, was deported in that year, and that Michelson went abroad with him; see Pinkson interview. Pinkson’s memory appears to be faulty, however, since Overgaard himself indicated that he was not deported until the late 1940s; see Andrew Overgaard, Autobiographical Transcript, Tamiment Library, New York University. In addition, the Smith Act, under which Overgaard was eventually deported, had not yet been passed. Journalist George Kirstein, citing an earlier article in *Women’s Wear Daily*, claimed that Michelson resigned for “reasons of health”; see George Kirstein, *Stores and Unions*, 58–59. Though asked in a later interview, Michelson herself immediately changed the subject; see Clarina Michelson interview.

77. Unfortunately, no prewar editions of the *Department Store Employee* still exist; this suggestion of the paper’s content is derived from Boyd, “Early Years,” 50, as well as issues from the early 1940s.

78. Letter From Wolchok To John Brophy (dated July 13, 1939), 1–2, Collection 1, Box 9, Folder 15, CUAA.


82. Letter from Wolchok to James Carey (dated November 25, 1940), Folder 17, Box 9, CIO Papers, CUAA.


the importance of the forty-hour week, see Rubinstein interview. For Wolchok on the eight-hour day, see “CIO Store Drive,” Business Week (July 26, 1941), 42.

85. For the beginning of the strike, see "Lewis Is Facing New C.I.O. Revolt," The New York Times (August 24, 1941), 19, and “Gimbel's Unions Begin Strike” Daily Worker (August 26, 1941), 4.

86. For Broido’s view of the strike as a failure on Wolchok’s part and a double cross by the local leaders, see Investigation on Communism, Testimony of Louis Broido, 43.

87. For the numbers of strikers, see both “Gimbel’s Strike Continues,” New York Times (August 22, 1941), 6, and “Gimbel’s Unions Begin Strike,” Daily Worker (August 26, 1941), 4.

88. Rubinstein interview.

89. Letters from Miss M. Dun, Mrs. E.T. Newell, and Miss R.T. Harnie (September 9, 1941) to Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, LaGuardia Papers, New York City Municipal Archives, Microfilm Roll 113.

90. For Helen Jacobson’s actions, see Letter from United Department Store Employees Union of Greater New York to Mayor LaGuardia, LaGuardia Papers, Microfilm Reel 113, September 5, 1941. See Investigation On Communism, Testimony of Louis Broido, 37, 41; and see “Involved In Strike, Bees Do Boomerang” The New York Times (September 7, 1941), 41. One curious note which indicates the possibility that the bees were the act of an agent provocateur is that during his testimony before the House of Representatives, Broido never mentioned the bees’ release into the store. Every aspect of the story, however, is suspicious: the man who released the bees claimed that the union had hired him, but was unable to identify any individuals; he also failed to explain why he had not simply followed earlier examples and left the bees in a box inside the store instead of releasing them while he was still present and, as a result, getting himself stung and caught.

91. Rubinstein interview; Schwartz interview; Abe Rosen, interviewed by Debra Bernhardt, New York, NY, April 21, 1980.


93. Agreement Between Gimbel Brothers, Inc. and CIO, URWDSEA, and Gimbel Local 2, Dated 24 November 1941 (effective as of September 12, 1941), 15–17, 21–22, Appendix A, Folder 18, Box 9, CIO Papers, CUAA. This minimum wage of $17 a week included the generally lower-paid workers in the employees’ lunchroom, but excluded the low-paid elevator operators. It is not known if elevator operators at Gimbel’s, like those at Macy’s, were African American.

94. “A&S Staff To Get 5-Day Week Oct. 6,” Women's Wear Daily (September 17, 1941), 1; “New Work Week and Store Hours in N.Y. Area By ’42,” Women's Wear Daily (October 10, 1941), 1, 2.

95. “Ninth Board Session Records Big Strides,” Retail Wholesale and Department Store Employee (October 31, 1941), 1, 5. See also William Michelson interview.

96. Minutes, Executive Board Meetings of Local 1-S (October 8, 1941 and October 22, 1941), 4–6, Box 1, Folder 15, Local 1-S Papers, Tamiment Library.
Notes to Chapter 4

99. William Michelson interview.

Chapter 4

9. For the flags, see “Fly Your Flag Every Day” [display advertisement for Gimbel's], *New York Times* (June 7, 1942), 23; for the films, see “Own Your Own Home Movie Actually Filmed While the Japs Bombed Pearl Harbor” [display advertisement for Macy's], *New York Times* (January 6, 1942), 8. “‘MacArthur: America's


16. “To the People of the Metropolitan Area,” New York Times (September 4, 1942), 8. If this notice was a paid advertisement—and it is laid out as a display advertisement, complete with a drawing of a man in colonial dress holding up a scroll with the text on it—there is nothing in the piece itself to tell who paid for it.

17. “Stores to Portray Work of Red Cross,” New York Times (February 4, 1943), 20. This practice apparently continued throughout the war; see “Apparel, Retail Red Cross Fund Drive Advances,” Women’s Wear Daily (March 6, 1944), 1, 15.

18. “Rallies, Parades, Open Retail Bond Drive Tomorrow,” Women’s Wear Daily (September 8, 1943), 1, 4. “Yes, Madam . . . We Sell Guns, Tanks Planes,” [display advertisement for Hearn’s], New York Times (January 1, 1942), 28. See also “All Out For Defense Savings,” Department Store Economist (January 10, 1942), 14. For the USO hostesses, see “Sailors Excel At Dance,” New York Times (June 24, 1942), 16.

Jane Spadavecchio was a hostess in Macy’s USO branch; see Spadavecchio interview.


20. “Find Women Workers In Stock Rooms Are Satisfactory,” Women’s Wear Daily (October 27, 1942), 31; “The Delivery Man Is Now A Woman,” New York Times (May 18, 1943), 20; for furniture sales as a high-paying job reserved for white men, see Atkinson interview. For lower pay for women, see “Squelch Prejudice Against New Employee, Is Advice,” Women’s Wear Daily (June 17, 1942), 27.

21. For African American women workers gaining some office and sales positions, see Spadavecchio interview; “Won’t Take Jim Crow Lying Down,” Department Store Employee (October 6, 1945), 4; “New York Stores Find Personnel In Unusual Places,” Women’s Wear Daily (January 31, 1945), 27; and J. W. Cohn, “Few NegroWorkers in Selling Jobs,” Women’s Wear Daily (March 14, 1946), 54. For the lower pay of African American workers, see Minutes of Local 1-S General Membership Meeting (dated 11 October 1942), 62, in Local 1-S Papers, Box 1, Folder 15. It should be noted that, although the offices at Macy’s and the sales force at Gimbel’s were somewhat integrated at this time, the sales force at Macy’s was strictly restricted for white workers until after the war; see Atkinson interview.

22. For the NRDGA talk, see “Self-Selection Held Way To Give Better Service,” Women’s Wear Daily (January 14, 1943), 36. For the effects of the failure of Macy’s on retailers in the area, see Frederic Hillegas, “Syracuse Merchants Hesitate About


26. For the parade, see “Drum to be Leader in March of 500,000,” New York Times (June 10, 1942), 12.


29. For workers’ and unions’ support of management’s pro-war efforts, see Loring interview.

30. William Michelson interview and Schwartz interview. For Morris’s entrance into the war, see Eli Halpern, “In Memory of Lowell Morris,” Department Store Employee (October 6, 1945), 3.

31. Atkinson interview and Schwartz interview. See also “New York Local Dept. Store Heads Inducted,” Retail Wholesale and Department Store Employee (February 28, 1942), 6. Atkinson, like Kovenetsky and many other Macy’s leaders, was not a Communist; less evidence exists about Blanck’s political affiliations, but she remained in various leadership positions in Local 2 long after the 1948 split with the CIO.

32. Minutes, Local 1-S General Membership Meeting (dated October 11, 1942), 62, in Local 1-S Papers, Box 1, Folder 15. For unions’ efforts to fight racial discrimination in the stores, see also Donald Pratt, “Store Unions Plan Pay Rise Requests,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 27, 1944), 24.

33. Minutes, Executive Board Meeting (dated June 2, 1942), 46, in Local 1-S Papers, Box 1, Folder 15. “Won’t Take Jim Crow Lying Down,” Department Store
Employee (October 6, 1945), 4; “Poll Tax,” Department Store Employee (December 3, 1943), 2; “Anti-Bias Group Sets To Work,” Department Store Employee (October 13, 1945), 4.

34. “House Votes Price Increase; Membership Action Urged,” Department Store Employee (December 3, 1943), 1. Since only one wartime issue of the Department Store Employee mentions this campaign, and neither the Local 1-S Papers nor any oral histories mention the anti-inflation campaign, it is possible that little time was spent organizing around this issue. For one Second Front resolution, see Minutes, Executive Board Meeting (dated 29 April 1942), Local 1-S Papers, Box 1, Folder 15.

35. “The Water’s Fine! Come On In, Boys And Girls!” Department Store Employee (October 13, 1945), 1; “Best Thing Union Has Done,” Department Store Employee (October 6, 1945), 1, 4.

36. This summary is taken from Nicholas Carnes, “How It All Began—Where We Are Going,” Department Store Employee (November 10, 1945), 3. Carnes had published an earlier article on the union’s history; see Nicholas Carnes, “Our Unions Have a History,” Department Store Employee (July 1943), 4; this issue of the newspaper, unfortunately, has been lost, and apparently no copies have survived. It is cited in Boyd, “Early Years of Local 1-S.”

37. “Convention Resolutions: Women’s Auxiliary,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (June 1942), 18.


40. For the RWDSU during the war, see cartoon accompanying “To NLRB Polls February 12,” Retail Wholesale and Department Store Employee (January 31, 1942), 9, and cartoon accompanying “Convention Outlook,” Retail Wholesale and Department Store Employee (April 30, 1942), 4. For the sole depiction of women as union representatives during the war, see “Doors Open May 18,” Retail Wholesale and Department Store Employee (March 31, 1942), 4.

41. “A Record of Achievement and Progress,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (June 22, 1942), 3, 5, 11.

42. Third Convention Proceedings, 190. Wolchok probably mentioned Local 1250 organizer Eli Halpern instead of Carnes or Clarina Michelson because of Halpern’s presence at the convention when these remarks were made rather than out of any greater animosity towards Halpern than towards the other department store union leaders or organizers.

43. Third Convention Proceedings, 194.

44. “President’s Speech of Welcome to Convention,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (June 1942), 5.

45. Investigation of Seizure of Montgomery Ward & Co.: Hearings Before the Select Committee to Investigate Seizure of Montgomery Ward & Co., House of Representatives, 78th Congress, Second Session, Pursuant To H. Res. 521 (May 22–25,
1944 and June 6–8, 1944). (U.S. Govt. Print Office; Washington, 1944) [Hereafter Montgomery Ward Hearings], Testimony of Samuel Wolchok, 481.

46. Montgomery Ward Hearings, Testimony of William H. Davis, 11. For these early struggles between Montgomery Ward and the federal government during the war, see also J. M. Baskin, “Ward’s Charges Discrimination Anew By OPA,” Women’s Wear Daily (November 18, 1942), 1, 5; “Duress Charge Rekindles Ward Row With WLB,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 2, 1942), 1, 24; “To All Montgomery Ward People” [display advertisement], Women’s Wear Daily (January 12, 1943), 52.


48. Ibid., 30.

49. For the sympathy strikes, see “More on Job at Chicago Unit, Ward’s States,” Women’s Wear Daily (April 17, 1944), 2. For Roosevelt’s order, see “President Orders Dispute at Ward’s to End Tomorrow,” Women’s Wear Daily (April 24, 1944), 1, 12; for the arrival of the military, see Montgomery Ward Hearings, Testimony of Sewell Avery, 331–32; “Ward, Chicago, Run By Commerce Dept.,” Women’s Wear Daily (April 27, 1944), 1, 6; and “Biddle Backs Legality of Ward Seizure,” Women’s Wear Daily (April 27, 1944), 1, 7.

50. Raymond Gibney, “Await Court Rule on Ward Seizure: Cannot Allow Employer or Union to Interfere,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 29, 1944), 1, 5; J.M. Baskin, “Army in Nominal Charge of Company Operations in 7 Cities,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 29, 1944), 1, 6; “Supreme Court Rules Thumbs Down on Ward,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (December 1944), 3; “Army Lays Down Law At Montgomery Ward,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (January 1945), 3, 7, 16; “Judge Sullivan Upholds Property Rights In Face of War Emergency; U.S. Appeals to Supreme Court,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 3; “Sweeping Redress for Chicago Ward Workers Ruled By Judge Knous,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 2; “Ward’s ‘Closed Shop’ Ends as Army Leaves,” Women’s Wear Daily (October 19, 1945), 1, 22.


52. Ibid., 3, 4, 8, 15.

53. “Condemn ’65’ Leadership,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 9; “Osman’s True Allegiance? Shown By Turnabout Face,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 27; “Nails Foes of URWDSEA’s War On Montgomery Ward,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 27; “Flays Local 65 Head for Union Treachery,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 26; “Points Out Flaws In ‘Sudden Switch,’” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 26; “Osman Aligns Union With ‘Worst Enemy,’” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (February 1945), 25; “Local 1102 Demands Board Nail Osman,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (March 1945), 24.


55. For an insightful defense of the no-strike pledge, see Joshua Freeman,

56. If the department store union leaders did release any statements on the Montgomery Ward strike, these statements have been both lost and entirely ignored by Wolchok and the other national leaders, a combination of events which seems unlikely.

**Chapter 5**


6. Ibid, 154. More discussion of branch stores will be provided in chapter 6.

7. For Parkchester, see “Macy’s Parkchester (org 1945) 1945 Agreement,” in Local 1-S Papers, Box 7, Folder 2. For the Jamaica store, see *Jamaica Jottings* (February 2, 1948). For the opening of the Jamaica store, see Glenn Fowler, “Macy’s Jamaica on First Day Draws Shelf-Clearing Crowd,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (September 8, 1947), 1, 41.

8. William B. Gorman, Secretary-Treasurer, Controllers’ Congress of the NRDGA and Controller, Gimbel Brothers, NY, “Looking Through the Figures—1945,” *Department Store Economist* (July 1946), 18. Much of this data is reprinted in table 5.1. For similar statements about the lack of increased productivity, see Herman


12. For the RLSA, see Marcella Loring, “Macy’s Cracks the Whip,” *Department Store Employee* (December 29, 1945), 1, “‘We Fight Fire With Fire’ In Forming Joint Board,” *Department Store Employee* (October 5, 1946), 3; Donald L. Pratt, “N.Y. Stores Pick Labor Relations Spokesman,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (November 21, 1945), 1, 30; “N.Y. Stores Labor Relations Group Holds Organization Meeting Today,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (November 29, 1945), 6; “Report to Membership” (February 5, 1947), 9, in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 23.


14. This description of work simplification is taken from Herman Radolf, “Job Simplification Should Never Stop,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (May 16, 1947), 45 and “Work Simplification Program Started at Saks Stores,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (February 3, 1947), 50; the industrial consultant quote is from Radolf; the notion of breaking down jobs is from “Work Simplification Program Started at Saks Stores.” For the focus on the simplification of nonsales jobs, see also “Stores Urged to Cut Corners, Increase Output Per Employee,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (June 12, 1947), 1, 47. For the layoffs, see Donald L. Pratt, “Dept. Store Union Locals Here Worried Over Rising Layoffs,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (March 20, 1947), 1, 4; “Hearn Workers Hit By Huge Layoffs,” *Union Voice* (January 1, 1950), 9; and “Macy Workers Charge Speedup Takes Heavy Toll in N.Y. Stores,” *Union Voice* (March 30, 1947), 3–4. For the union’s inability to prevent layoffs, see “Union Softens B‘dale Layoff Impact,” *Union Voice* (January 1, 1950), 4. For the speedups, see especially Pratt, “Dept. Store Union Locals” and “Macy’s Denies Speedup, Stewards Map Action,” *Union Voice* (June 22, 1947), 7.


16. “Strike Cripples Macy’s; HCL Wage Talk Asked,” *Department Store Employee* (July 1946), 1. For the Parkchester store, see “Sales off 30% At Parkchester in Macy

17. For the triple-pay policy, see Jack I. Straus, Letter to All Macy’s Employees (July 22, 1946) in Local 1-S Papers, Box 5, Folder 29.


20. Letter from Miss E. Goldstein to Sadka Brown (dated January 11, 1950), in District 65 Papers, Box 59, Folder 8.


22. For the attacks on Wolchok, see Donald Pratt, “Retail Union Fight Here May Get Into Court,” *Women's Wear Daily* (January 9, 1946), 1, 49; and “N.Y. Locals’ Rift With Wolchok Grows,” *Women's Wear Daily* (January 23, 1946), 1, 10.


28. For Wolchok's earlier position, see Local 1-S Executive Board Meeting of April 24, 1946, Box 1, Folder 18, Local 1-S Papers. For his reversal and support for the Joint Board, see “Department Store Joint Board To Get Going In January,” *Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee* (January 1947), 14. For the new hands-off policy, see Jack Altman, “On Department Stores,” *Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee* (February 1947), 6.


32. For the *Union Voice*, see “Employee, Union Voice Join After This Issue,”
Department Store Employee (January 11, 1947), 1. “The 1-S Glee Club In Action,”
Department Store Employee (November 24, 1945), 1; “Fun High on Agenda at Card
Party,” Department Store Employee (December 8, 1945), 1; “There Goes That Dance
Again!” Department Store Employee (December 8, 1945), 1.
35. Thursdays Till Nine, Act I, 31; Arthur Adler, “Miracle on 34th Street is
Delightful Whimsy—Should Happen in Macys,” Union Voice (June 22, 1947), 21.
36. On the Taft-Hartley Act, see George Lipsitz, Rainbow At Midnight: Labor
and Culture in the 1940s (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 169–79.
37. Even those union members who worked in the stores for many years
could be entirely unaware of the political issues surrounding the union; though
she vividly remembered many of her experiences at Macy’s, union member Jane
Spadavecchio did not remember any political conflict within the union at this time.
See Spadavecchio interview. The union leaders themselves stated that most workers
were not particularly aware of “the extent of the problems” which Taft-Hartley pre-
sented for the union leaders; see Report on Structural Changes, delivered by Sadka
Brown, Local 5 Leadership Conference (May 7, 1948), 3, 4, 6, in District 65 Papers,
Box 60, Folder 23.
38. Minutes, Local 5 Executive Board Meeting (September 2, 1947), in Folder
23, Box 60, District 65 Papers. The Hearn’s managers’ statement is quoted in Joint
Department Store Board, Negotiations Bulletin 6 (June 7, 1948), in District 65 Papers,
Box 60, Folder 23.
39. “Administration Slate Wins in Local 1-S Record Vote; Red-Baiters Snowed
Under,” Union Voice (February 2, 1947), 2. Testimony of Bertha Kronthal, Investigation
On Communism In New York City Distributive Trade, 649.
see also Ellen Schrecker, Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America (Princeton:
Some Communist leaders claimed the parade had as many as 100,000 people in
attendance, but this claim is in serious dispute; most observers were inclined to agree
that the police estimate of just over 20,000 was closer to the actual number of people
marching in the parade. For this dispute see “Left Outnumbered on May Day Here;
Europe is Orderly,” New York Times (May 2, 1948), 1, 3.
42. “NLRB Accepts Affidavits,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee
(March 1948), 1. John V. Cooney Letter “To All Locals . . .” (dated February 17, 1948)
in Local 1-S Papers, Box 4, Folder 20.
43. Glenn Fowler, “CIO Store Locals Seek Pact Extension as Deadline Nears,”
Women’s Wear Daily (August 21, 1947), 2; “CIO Contracts Extended by 9 Stores in
N.Y.,” Women’s Wear Daily (August 25, 1947), 1, 32; and Investigation on Communism,
Testimony of Louis Broido, 88.
44. For Kovenetsky as a non-Communist, see, for example, William Michelson
interview. Kovenetsky himself was the only member of the New York coalition who
denied being a Communist under oath; see Investigation, Testimony of Samuel
Kovenetsky, 584. Kovenetsky’s refusal to sign the petition against the will of the members was stated in Kovenetsky interview, 31. He made substantially the same statement about his affidavit relying on the members’ willingness to have him sign at the 1948 congressional hearings on the subject; see Investigation, Testimony of Samuel Kovenetsky, 565.

45. For the expulsions, see “Probe Ordered On Expulsions by Store Union,” Women’s Wear Daily (June 4, 1948), 1, 45; George G. Kirstein, “Labor and Management,” Women’s Wear Daily (June 11, 1948), 55; and also Investigation, Testimony of Alice Bartoli, Shop-Steward, Local 1-S, 658. For the Daily News articles, see “The Stores Had Better Fight,” Daily News (June 3, 1948), 39, and “Shall Reds Boss The Stores?” Daily News (June 18, 1948), 35; as well as the editorial cartoon, “Invite,” Daily News (June 18, 1948), 35. For the reversal of the expulsions, see Glenn Fowler, “Reversal Set on Expulsions By Store Union,” Women’s Wear Daily (June 18, 1948), 1, 7.

46. For the initial contract between Oppenheim Collins and Local 1250, see “Oppenheim Collins, Union Agree on Pact,” Women’s Wear Daily (August 27, 1946), 4. For the contract renewal, see “The Oppenheim Collins Strikers Thank The Public,” undated flyer, issued by Local 1250, in Folder 12, Box 60, District 65 Papers; see also “GEB Orders T-H Compliance; Four Non-Complying Locals Suspended,” Retail Wholesale Department Store Employee (September 1948), 3. A good summary of the various manipulations at Oppenheim Collins is available in Women’s Wear Daily; see especially Fred Eichelbaum, “Election Won By AFL Union At Oppenheim’s,” Women’s Wear Daily (August 3, 1948), 1, 12; and “Court Restrains Mass Picketing at Oppenheim’s,” Women’s Wear Daily (August 16, 1948), 1.

47. For the union stance, see “Put Yourself In Our Place,” sample leaflet, undated, issued by Local 1250, undated, in Folder 12, Box 60, District 65 Papers. For Oppenheim Collins’ stance, see “Union Defeat in Oppenheim Poll Claimed,” Women’s Wear Daily (June 16, 1948), 5.


53. Investigation, Testimony of Jack Altman, 515.


55. Atkinson interview; Kovenetsky interview, 39.

57. Report To Executive Board Meeting (August 17, 1948), delivered by Sadka Brown, in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 12; Report To Divisional Meetings (August 1948), delivered by Sadka Brown, in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 12.

58. “Resolution on Disaffiliation, Adopted by Membership of Local 5, RWDSU, CIO, at Meeting Held September 21, 1948,” District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 12. As we will see, contrary to the workers’ supporting the RWDSU, it was union leaders who would soon become the strongest supporters of reaffiliation.

59. Samuel Wolchok, Letter to Membership (Undated), 2–3, in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 12.

60. This event is recounted in Atkinson interview. Atkinson claimed that this event took place just before the war. The minutes from the executive board meetings in 1941, however, have no record of any such conflict. Also, no evidence indicates that Jack Altman was involved with the department store unions until the end of the war, when he became the new administrator of Local 1-S. It seems likely, therefore, that Atkinson’s memory was inaccurate on the date of this incident. For the administrators, see “Administrators Named to Run Retail Locals,” Women’s Wear Daily (August 26, 1948), 1, 8.


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2. For the failure of the drive, see “N.Y. Locals Concede Failure in Store Organizing Drive,” Women’s Wear Daily (April 13, 1953), 1, 34.

3. “7 St. East Near Stuyvesant Town,” classified advertisement, New York Times (June 27, 1948), R18. For the description of Stuyvesant Town as suburbia, see “Projects’ Become Home, Sweet Home,” New York Times (June 21, 1949), 27. For Stuyvesant Town as a project for “the middle-income group,” see Robert M. Hallett,
“Slums Out, Homes In,” Christian Science Monitor (January 11, 1947), WM2. For the unique nature of the project, see “Housing Squeeze Held Threat To N.Y. Department Stores,” Women’s Wear Daily (June 20, 1952), 2.


8. For the quote on the new era of retailing, see Richard Neumaier, “A New Era In Unit Control Has Arrived,” Department Store Economist (September 1953), 40–41. Others seconded Neumaier’s opinion of the early 1950s as a new era in retailing; see especially Wade G. McCarbo, “1953—A Year of Challenge and Opportunity,” Department Store Economist (February 1953), 35. For her memories of Klein’s, see Corrine Demas, Eleven Stories High: Growing Up In Stuyvesant Town, 1948–1968 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 85, 88. Although they are not explicit about why customers disliked full-service, managers insisted that customer preference was a major reason for instituting self-service retailing. See, for instance, Abe Hackman, “Stores Should Explore All Ways to Raise Productivity,” Women’s Wear Daily (May 5, 1952), 42; the Women’s Wear Daily survey summarized in “Self-Service Hailed As 100% Success,” Women’s Wear Daily (September 5, 1952), 9, also indicates that 89 percent of store managers believed self-service departments were more popular than full-service.

9. Mary Roche, “Model Apartment Adopts New Dress,” New York Times (November 18, 1947), 35. See also Pete Montanaro, Untitled Report to Local 1250 Membership Meeting (August 19, 1952), 1–3, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 16. For Hearn’s expansion into higher-priced goods (although Stuyvesant Town is not specifically mentioned), see “Store’s New ‘Look’ Sells New Merchandising


11. For the elimination of the gift-wrapping unit and wage and cost-cutting at Gimbel’s, see Minutes, Executive Board Meeting of Local 2, United Department Store Workers of New York (May 9, 1950), 1–2, in Folder 33, Box 14, District 65 Papers. For the quotations from buyers and the trend towards self-service, see “Transformation of Main Floor at Gimbel’s,” *Department Store Economist* (January 1951), 33–34, 52. See also Herman Radolf, “Plain Old Gimbel’s Bows Out With New Main Floor,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (November 8, 1950), 94, and Fred Eichelbaum, “Need For Better Efficiency in Customer Services Emphasized,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (January 10, 1951), 106.


14. “Branded Lines Called Good Investment for the Future,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 21, 1944), 31; “Brands Make Selling Easier, Get Nod From Most Stores,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (October 15, 1953), Special Fashion Brands section, p. 4; “Many Customers Buy Merchandise By Brand Name,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (October 15, 1953), Special Fashion Brands section, p. 4; Samuel Feinberg, “From Where I Sit,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (December 18, 1953), 39. Department stores were unusually hesitant when dealing with television. While a few stores—A&S among them—launched major television campaigns, most store managers viewed television as expensive and ultimately useless, especially considering how poor early television sets were for conveying the styles and colors of the stores’ clothing lines. For a good summary of the early history, see Ed Gold, “Fear of TV Traced to Early Flops,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (March 13, 1952), 65. For A&S’s television efforts, see Alvin Dann, “Abraham & Straus Launches Video Series With a New Slant,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (October 3, 1950), 59.
15. For the doubts about the greater efficiency of self-service, see “Greater Productivity’s The Riddle,” Women’s Wear Daily, Section 2 (December 27, 1948), 4, 50, 52. For the ultimate decision that self-service was practical, see “Super Market Selling Methods Held Cost-Savers,” Women’s Wear Daily (January 10, 1952), 66.

16. For the television cameras in stores, see “TV Eye Helps Stores To Foil Shoplifters,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 11, 1953), 44; “This Customer May Not Know It . . . But She’s On Television,” Women’s Wear Daily (November 19, 1953), 50; and “Effect of Self-Service On Protection Staff Cited,” Women’s Wear Daily (September 3, 1953), 47. For the electronic price tag, see Richard Neumaier, “A New Era In Unit Control Has Arrived,” Department Store Economist (September 1953), 40–41, 68; Bob Johnston, “Punched Card Unit Control Safeguards Stock Investment,” Women’s Wear Daily (February 11, 1952), 41; and Herman Radolf, “Bloomingdale’s to Get First Rem Rand Tag Reader Setup,” Women’s Wear Daily (April 1, 1953), 63. Neumaier’s enthusiasm notwithstanding, in the early 1950s most store managers still hesitated to adopt these measures; see “Electronics Still Too Costly For Use in Department Stores,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 15, 1952), 38.


18. Letter from Louis Broido to David Livingston, President DPOWA, dated August 1952, in Gimbels and Saks Collection (Volume 3), Baker Library, Harvard University.

19. Minutes, Local 1250 Executive Board Meeting (October 1, 1952), 1, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 16. For the CIO’s stance, see “Self-Service Held Necessary Move at CIO Convention,” Women’s Wear Daily (November 23, 1953), 1, 29.

20. Post-1948 layoffs and restructuring will be discussed further later in this chapter. For anti-union announcements at training programs, see Minutes, Local 2 Executive Board Meeting (May 9, 1950), 1, District 65 Papers, Box 14, Folder 33. For the Macy’s Star, see “Stress Employees’ Role in Guiding Store Union Policy,” Women’s Wear Daily (July 2, 1948), 33.

21. For Quill’s threat, see Bernard Tolkow, Report of 1250 Membership-Wage Drive (September 24, 1951), in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 15. For the “iron curtain” quote, see “CIO Shaping 2-Prong Drive At N.Y. Stores,” Women’s Wear Daily (October 22, 1951), 1, 51.

22. Memorandum (“Sparklet”) To Macy’s Employees from Frederick G. Atkinson, Vice-President of Personnel at Macy’s (September 7, 1948); managers’ joint statement is discussed in Bernard Tolkow, “Collective Bargaining,” Report Delivered at Local 1250 Membership Meeting (November 20, 1950), in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 4. See also “Bloomingdale’s Weighs Stand,” Women’s Wear Daily (September 15, 1948), 4; “International Officer Barred From Stern Wage Arbitration,” Women’s Wear Daily (September 17, 1948), 7; and, for a good summary of the position of managers on these struggles, George Kirstein, “Labor and Management,” Women’s Wear Daily (September 17, 1948), 59.

23. For the local leaders’ decision to sign, see Report to Local 5 Membership Meeting, delivered by Sadka Brown, (dated October 25, 1948), 6, in District 65
Papers, Folder 12, Box 60. For Michelson’s delay in signing, see “Remarks Made by Arthur Osman on Bill Michelson’s Report at the UDSW General Council Meeting on May 24, 1950,” 6, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 49.


25. Ibid., 2.


28. For the social calendar, see Minutes of Local 3 Membership Meeting (June 1951), 5, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 7. For the union leaders’ determination to revive the union’s cultural programs and its relation to union members’ dedication to the union, see Irving Baldinger, “Report on Union Voice,” Local 65 General Council (June 27, 1949), 2. For the boat trip, see Simon, Stuyvesant Town, U.S.A., 78.

29. Glenn Fowler, “Retail Union Buying Service Activity Grows,” Women’s Wear Daily (May 26, 1950), 1, 41; for the pensions, see Fowler, “Retail Union in Pension Drive at N.Y. Stores,” Women’s Wear Daily (December 3, 1951), 1, 43.

30. For the Rosenberg vigil, see especially Laura Helton, “It never became the same;’ Memories of Union Square as a Center of Radicalism,” Panel on “Site of Memory and Contestation: Union Square and Social Movements in the Twentieth Century,” History Matters Conference (2003), New School University, New York.


33. “Gimbel Workers Halt Move to Cut Earnings,” Union Voice (July 31, 1949), 7. See also Sadka Brown, “Short Analysis and Recommendations to Executive Board, Shop Stewards, Negotiations Committee” (February 2, 1949), 1, in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 13.

34. See, for instance, “Gimbel Workers Halt Move to Cut Earnings,” Union Voice (July 31, 1949), 7; “Hearn Units Speed Strike Preparations,” Union Voice (November 6, 1949), 2; and “Flashbacks of 1949,” Union Voice (January 15, 1950), M4–M5.


37. “Case #137, Accounts Payable Dept. (Gimbels) vs. Local 2 Executive Board, Hearing Held May 31st, 1951,” in District 65 General Council Meeting Minutes (June 6, 1951), 1–2.

38. “Negroes Being Upgraded at Gimbel’s, Saks,” Union Voice (December 18,
1949), 12. For the Stern’s negotiations, see “Report and Proposals to Executive Board and Shop Stewards Meeting,” (February 8, 1949), in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 13. “Report to Membership Meeting” (January 26, 1949), 9, in District 65 Papers, Box 60, Folder 13.


42. For the pictures printed during the debate, see “Taking Sides,” Union Voice (August 28, 1949), 11, and “Center of the Storm,” Union Voice (September 11, 1949), 11. For the decision and the photograph which accompanied it, see “On Cheesecake,” Union Voice (October 9, 1949), 8.

43. Florence Holt, “Report on Special Problems of Women Members” (April 23–25, 1951), delivered before Divisional Membership Meetings, Local 3, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 7. Divisional Membership Meetings were meetings where the membership met in separate divisions; at Bloomingdale’s, these divisions consisted of office workers, sales workers, and nonsales workers.

44. Bernie Tolkow, “Report to Membership Meeting, Local 1250” (dated January 29, 1951), 1, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 10. Tolkow was quoting Local 65 leader David Livingston in this passage.

45. Minutes of June Membership Meeting (1951), Local 3, 1–2, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 7.

46. Murray Silverstein, “Report on Communications” (1951?), 1, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 7.

47. For Michelson’s statements, see Minutes of Local 2 Executive Board Meeting (May 15, 1951), in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 6. For Carnes’ statement, see Minutes, Local 1250 Executive Board Meeting (February 5, 1951), 1, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 10.


50. For the fair trade laws and the nullification of these laws, see “Individualism Held Returning to Retail Field,” Women’s Wear Daily (May 31, 1951), 1, 64. On the
1951 price war, see “Nation’s Stores Plan To Meet Price Cuts; Action Widens in N.Y.,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (May 31, 1951), 1; Glenn Fowler, “New York Stores Jammed As Price Cuts Continue,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (June 1, 1951), 1; and “Price Cuts Spreading To Other Sections; Broaden in New York,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (June 4, 1951), 1; and Glenn Fowler, “A&S Taking Initiative In Price Battle,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (June 14, 1951), 1, 60.


54. For the Hearn’s concession on Monday nights, see Peter Stein, “report to Local 1250 Membership Meeting” (February 29, 1952), District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 16. For the Norton’s concession, see Minutes, Norton Membership Meeting (November 20, 1953), in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 22.

55. Minutes of Norton’s Chapter Meeting (February 25, 1952), 1, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 16.

56. Minutes, Local 2 Executive Board Meeting (February 19, 1952), 1–2, in District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 13; “Distributive Union May Return to CIO,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (January 30, 1952), 2; and Glenn Fowler, “Retail Union Takes Stand On DPOWA,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (February 1, 1952), 51.


58. For the discussion of not endorsing a candidate in the 1952 election, see “65ers Say: Adlai! Debate on Stevenson Endorsement An Example of Union Democracy,” *Union Voice* (October 19, 1952), Section 2, 1. For the final endorsement, see “Livingston Sees Endorsement of Stevenson Aiding ’65’ Unity,” *Union Voice* (October 19, 1952), 5.


64. Alex H. Kendreck and Jerome Golden, “Lessons of the Struggle Against Opportunism in District 65, I,” *Political Affairs* (June 1953), 26, 28, 36–37. This was to be the first of a two-part series; the second article, for reasons which are unclear, was never printed.


67. “‘Supermarket’ Type Operation in Apparel Planned By Lerner’s,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (March 16, 1951), 1, 47; Fred Eichelbaum, “‘Highly Satisfactory’ Results Reported on Lanes First Day,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (September 7, 1951), 1, 47.

68. Pete Montanaro, Untitled Report to Local 1250 Membership Meeting (August 19, 1952), 2. See also “Hearn’s Operations Changing To Nearly 100% Supermarket,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (September 16, 1952), 1, 47; “Details Given On Shift in Hearns Setup,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (September 17, 1952), 5; and “800 Hearns Store Strikers Solid in 3d Week of Walkout,” *Union Voice* (May 31, 1953), 3. For the extra hours, see Pete Stein, Report to Local 1250 Membership Meeting (dated April 29, 1952), 2, District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 16.

69. Pete Stein, Report to Local 1250 Membership Meeting (dated April 29, 1952), 2, District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 16.


74. For the initial injunction at Hearns, see “800 Hearns Store Strikers Solid in 3d Week of Walkout,” (March 31, 1953), 3. For the reference to Loeser’s and store closings, see Berlfein, “Hearns Threatens To Close if Union Action Continues,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (May 15, 1953), 1, 47 and “Warns Hearns May Fold If Program Fails,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 14, 1953), 1, 16. For the RCIPA’s involvement, see “AFL Retail Union Acts to Represent Hearns Workers,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (June 9, 1953), 4, and “RCIA Withdrawal From Hearns Held Aid to Bargaining,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (August 31, 1953), 2. For the strike discount, see “‘Strike’ Price Discount Will End at Hearns,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 10, 1953), 2.

75. “Hearn Strikers Crown Their Queen,” *Union Voice* (June 14, 1953), M 2.
76. Lynn Bortnick, untitled photograph of Hearn's strikers, *Union Voice* (June 14, 1953), 5.


83. For the NLRB’s dismissal, see “Union Charges Against Hearns Are Dismissed,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 8, 1953), 1, 69. For the injunction, see “Court Limits Pickets At Hearns; Restains Violence, Intimidation,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 1, 1953), 6; “Appellate Court Restricts Pickets at Hearns to Three,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (July 9, 1953), 10; and “All Picketing At Hearns Is Barred By Writ,” *Women’s Wear Daily* (October 7, 1953), 1, 78. For the defeat at Hearns, including the injunctions, see Murray Silverstein, “Collective Bargaining Report” to Membership Meeting, Local 3 (November 10, 1953), 1, District 65 Papers, Box 15, Folder 20.

**Conclusion**


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