Uneasy Alliances
Hull House, the Garment Workers Strikes, and the Jews of Chicago

SUSAN ROTH BREITZER

Hull House, for over a century regarded as a venerable Chicago institution, has more recently come under a growing amount of critical scrutiny, as has its often-lionized founder, Jane Addams. Hull House's relationship with Chicago's Jewish community has become a source of particular interest, especially in its comparison with Addams's relations to other local immigrant communities. One scholar has argued that while Hull House's cooperation with the Jewish labor movement is justly famous, it “should be seen more in the context of Hull House's industrial relations policies than as an expression of its relations with the Jewish community as such.” Yet given that most of the clothing manu-

Susan Roth Breitzer completed her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 2007 and is currently revising her dissertation, "Jewish Labor's Second City: The Formation of a Jewish Working Class in Chicago, 1886-1928," toward publication. She would like to thank David Zonderman, Karen Pastorello, and the anonymous reviewer for their comments and suggestions, and the Chicago Historical Society for the Student Research Award that provided partial support for researching and writing this article. She would also like to thank Susan Boone, Reference Archivist of the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, for permission to quote material from the Ellen Gates Starr Papers, and Patrizia Sione, Reference Archivist of the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation at Cornell University, for permission to quote material from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America Papers.

facturers against whom the predominantly Eastern European Jewish workers took to the streets were German Jews, ethnic issues never lay far below the surface of labor tensions in the garment industry. Given, as well, the more general divisions—of class, language, and culture—that separated these elements of Chicago’s Jewish community, Hull House residents could have done nothing other than relate to each group differently.

The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to examine the role of two key labor actions on the part of Chicago’s Eastern European Jewish working class during the early decades of the twentieth century—the 1910 and 1915 men’s garment workers strikes—on bringing about a shift in the alliances between Hull House and Chicago’s two Jewish communities, both of which had played significant roles in making the city an important center of the American garment industry during this period.

A little background history is in order. While Jewish peddlers and fur traders had passed through the area that became Chicago well before its incorporation, the first Jewish resident in Chicago was Morris Baumgarten, who was believed to have arrived in 1832, with the peddler J. Gottlieb following two years later. Other Jewish settlers, almost entirely of German extraction (save for a small Polish minority) followed. Although the majority arrived as poor as their non-Jewish counterparts, they had the significant advantages of literacy and of occupation, the latter usually as middlemen and peddlers. Moreover, they were comfortable around Gentiles to a degree that would have been unthinkable to their Eastern European immigrant counterparts. Most German Jews in nineteenth-century America became part of the merchant class, and a few transformed small businesses into highly profitable and widely known corporations, usually in dry goods or the clothing industry, including Chicago’s phenomenally successful men’s clothing manufacturers: Hart, Schaffner, and Marx; Alfred Decker and Cohn; and Kuppenheimer and Company. The vast majority of German Jewish immigrants, however, were less likely to have achieved elite status than

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simply a comfortable middle-class existence, one that would take significantly longer to achieve for most of their Eastern European coreligionists who arrived en masse decades later.5

Unlike the German “Second Wave” of Jewish immigrants who gravitated to small towns as well as major cities, the “Third Wave” by and large favored the larger cities, such as Chicago. More significantly, the vast majority of this new group of Jewish immigrants arrived with little education or worldly wealth, and seemed comparatively assimilable to Protestant America and to their coreligionists alike. While this group included a smattering of small-time merchants, such as rag dealers and craftsmen of various kinds, the vast majority were involved in clothes making.6 The trade of clothes making held several advantages for Jewish immigrants to America, ranging from its established acceptability as an occupation to the consideration that, as Howard M. Sachar put it, “for their ill-nourished and undersized physiques…it was assuredly a preferable alternative to employment in the mines and factories of heavy industry.”7

When the Chicago Fire struck, Jews from all sectors of the community suffered, with five hundred Jewish families left homeless and five of the seven synagogues in Chicago destroyed, to say nothing of the loss of lodges, businesses, and institutions. As a result of the fire, however, given limited resources and inordinately great need, major tensions arose for the first time regarding how much the by-then established German Jewish community should assist the more recent arrivals from Russia and Eastern Europe, and in what ways.8 The German Jewish attitude is illustrated in an 1882 report on aid-giving in The Occident, a popular American Jewish periodical, which referred to the newcomers as “the incoming slaves…of which nearly five hundred are booked for this city” and complained “The Russo-Israelite is a stubborn fellow, and will give any but the right answers,” adding that “having been constantly under [the] surveillance of a despotic government; the neighbor of a

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5Hertzberg, Jews in America, 118, 136-38.
fanatical and bigoted rabble; he becomes stolid and passive, and therefore, unwilling to convey the right answer.\textsuperscript{9} The bigotry and probing attitude of Americanized German Jewish aid workers, combined with language problems, probably did little to encourage new Jewish arrivals to Chicago to open up to benefactors whom they regarded with equal suspicion. The aid societies may have lacked cultural sensitivity, but they were thorough in trying to assimilate the new arrivals into American society in the ways they deemed best, as well as following the well-established immigrant Jewish tradition of never allowing one's own to become a public charge.\textsuperscript{10} Over time, the benefactor-beneficiary relationship between the two communities, which from the beginning were visibly divided by class as well as ethnicity, would become inextricably tied to the employer-employee relationship.

Differences were immediately manifested in the locations where each community resided, reflecting the class and ethnic segregation by neighborhood that was pervasive throughout Chicago. In the era following the Great Fire, the German Jewish community increasingly settled into the “Golden Ghetto” of Chicago’s South Side. The Eastern European Jewish community made its first home on the West Side in what became Chicago's own distinct Jewish ghetto. Maxwell Street, which today is lost to neglect and the destructive side of urban renewal, has been fondly remembered as the heart of Chicago’s Eastern European Jewish ghetto.\textsuperscript{11} For all the communal advantages it provided, life in Maxwell Street was rarely easy. Housing was crowded and frequently substandard, and the surrounding prairie did not prevent builders from crowding buildings together or constructing living spaces with inadequate (and in some cases nonexistent) outside lighting, ventilation, or plumbing.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{9}“Slave Cunning,” The Occident, August 4, 1882, Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago (hereafter CFLPS).

\textsuperscript{10}Hertzberg, Jews in America, 141-42, 177-78, 182-83.


LABOR ISSUES WITHIN CHICAGO’S JEWISH COMMUNITY

These unhealthy dwellings served not only as living spaces for large numbers of immigrants, but also frequently as workspaces for a number of Chicago’s industries, most infamously the clothing industry. And as Chicago’s clothing industry grew from the 1860s onward, the number of sweatshops increased exponentially. Early efforts to organize the garment trades unions met with limited success. The structure of the industry, which centered on putting out piecework to a frequently untraceable warren of sweatshops, was only the beginning of the fledgling garment trades movement’s difficulties, that also included the ethnic diversity of the workforce and employers’ willingness to exploit intergroup prejudices.¹³ Although these sweatshop conditions at first applied fairly equally to all sectors of the clothing industries, notable advances were to take place within the men’s clothing trades. By the 1890s, there was an increased demand for “quality tailoring,” which facilitated the increased move of men’s clothing manufacturing to the factories, or “inside shops.”¹⁴ Even among “inside shops, however,” some clothing firms emerged as “better than,” and the one regarded as the best by any measure was Hart, Schaffner, and Marx, which by 1905 had bought out the sweatshops to which it had been contracting out businesses, unprecedentedly moving all operations under its supervision.¹⁵

Despite its much-lauded reputation for progressiveness, HSM made no pretense of workplace democracy. Foremen (and “foreladies” for that matter) could be arbitrary and abusive, and the purpose of day-to-day management was, for all accounts, to keep worker earnings as low as possible. As Rebecca August, who began working at HSM around 1905 recalled, “the Head man used to see to it that workers didn’t make too much money,” adding “when he thot [sic] the fastest worker made $20 or more, all the others had to have their price cut.” What made working at HSM more bearable, and even comparatively desirable, was that it was otherwise vastly superior in terms of wages, hours, and work-

¹³Carsel, A History of the Chicago Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union, 4-6, 8.
¹⁴Barbara Warne Newell, Chicago and the Labor Movement: Metropolitan Unionism in the 1930’s (Urbana, Ill., 1961), 58.
ing conditions, especially at a time when most clothing houses were going in the opposite direction, moving work to “outside” shops at the same time that immigrants were increasingly replacing native-born workers in the workforce. Although German Jewish business owners were apparently responsive to the prophetic call of Reform Judaism and Ethical Culture before 1910, this translated mainly into charitable giving on behalf of the Eastern European Jewish workers who could not support their families on what they were paid. Also, rather than looking critically at themselves, most chose to feel comfortably superior to the Eastern European Jewish sweatshop bosses, many of whom were genuinely more exploitative in how they treated those below them.16

PROGRESSIVISM AND THE INFLUENCE OF HULL HOUSE

These conditions would make questions concerning work, poverty, and charity more urgent for Chicago’s Jewish community, and this urgency only increased with the onset of the economic downturn that became known as the Panic of 1893. It came hard on the heels of the World’s Columbian Exposition, a time when Chicago was showing its best face to the world. The Panic hit Chicago hard, leaving massive unemployment, with twenty percent of the workforce laid off during the winter of 1892-93 alone, and more than ten percent of the city’s population threatened with starvation. The 1893 Panic also triggered a new upsurge of labor unrest that reached another peak with the Pullman Strike of 1894, an event magnified by the willingness of the press to stir up public fears of a life-and-death struggle between labor and capital, making its eventual defeat another serious trial for the Chicago labor movement.17 One important result was the creation of the new move-

ment that became known as Progressivism. Although the Progressive movement was decidedly middle to upper-middle class in both origins and focuses, it differed from previous reform movements in its ability to form and maintain at least “on-again, off-again” alliances with labor and the working class, including the Jewish working class.\textsuperscript{18} And Hull House, usually regarded as the grandmother of social settlements, was often at the forefront of these efforts, although strategies and approaches would vary among its residents.

In 1889, Jane Addams, a well-to-do, college-educated Protestant woman from downstate Illinois, founded Hull House as an answer for women who were seeking alternatives to marriage and uses for their education. It was a center of both social services and Americanization that welcomed the broad spectrum of immigrants who flocked to Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although not the first settlement house in the United States, it soon became lionized, along with its founder.\textsuperscript{19} Hull House, through Addams and her resident colleagues including Florence Kelley, Grace and Edith Abbott, and Ellen Gates Starr, also served as a clearinghouse for a variety of immigrant needs and concerns, and therefore grew from being a friendly gathering place for immigrant neighbors to a formidable force for change in Chicago, and ultimately nationwide, on several fronts.\textsuperscript{20}

Nonetheless, Addams and Hull House were never without their detractors, including immigrants who saw what could today be described as a lack of genuine cultural sensitivity. Indeed, one recent scholar has concluded that Addams had the least success working with Eastern European Jewish immigrants, especially when it came to the matter of affirming ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{21} Even so, there is plenty of evidence


\textsuperscript{19}Mary Lynn McCree Bryan and Allen F. Davis, eds., \textit{One Hundred Years at Hull House} (Bloomington, Ind., 1990), 5.


that Eastern European Jewish immigrants benefited from Hull House’s services, especially before there was a Jewish-run settlement or communal center of any kind to provide significant competition. For example, the autobiography of Hilda Satt Polacheck, a Russian Jewish immigrant to Chicago, focused on how Addams changed the course of her life. Polacheck—at the time a clothing worker—had, after one long day on the job, walked over to Hull House, where Addams talked to her and decided that she should try hand spinning for the settlement’s Labor Museum, a handicrafts workshop for immigrant youth. Polacheck responded well to the craft, and went on to become an active member of the Hull House community, eventually obtaining a college education with Addams’s encouragement.22

Over time, however, Polacheck’s story became less and less typical, as Hull House received increased competition from German Jewish organizations such as the Maxwell Street Settlement and, more significantly, the Chicago Hebrew Institute. While Addams has been rightly lauded for her role in transforming the lives of all the working-class immigrant communities through her active support of the garment trades and other union movements, her overall legacy in Chicago’s Jewish community is more mixed, owing largely to the tension within that community between Germans and Eastern Europeans, and between longtime and newly arrived immigrants. This tension, in turn, highlighted the difficulties of reconciling Addams’s stated objective of Americanization with her growing appreciation of the necessity of maintaining the best of immigrant cultures. In some ways Addams and her Hull House colleagues were thoroughly in league with the German Jewish ideal of Americanization: that Jewish identity should be maintained but should also be adapted as much as possible to American ways. As part of their opposition to bilingual education, they supported the efforts of Chicago’s German Jews to eliminate the cheder (the traditional religious school), both out of concern for poor educational conditions (already a concern throughout the city’s Jewish community) and out of a fear that pupils would “defer the hopes of American citizenship by the substitution of Judisch for English.”23 In a similar expression of frustra-


Hull House resident Mary Rozet Smith wrote to Esther Loeb Kohn, a German Jewish Hull House resident, in regard to the settlement’s Children’s House activities: “the cooking is going gaily though several little Jewish girls are looking rather gloomily at their dish of beef and salt pork.”

According to Rivka Lissak, the principle reason for Addams’s failure to greatly influence Chicago’s Eastern European Jewish community was her unwillingness to recognize their existing sense of communal identity. Throughout her career at the helm of Hull House, Addams made no provisions for the importance of Yiddish language and culture as an existing source of identity for the city’s Eastern European Jews. By the same token, the Eastern European Jewish community already had its own Americanizing agent in the German Jewish community: “[T]he Jewish leadership as a whole,” writes Lissak, “was reluctant to give Hull House any foothold in the education of its youth or in meeting their social, cultural, and welfare needs,” except in an advisory role.

But if Hull House residents proved inadequate to the task of recognizing the subtleties of Jewish cultural identity, they achieved far greater success in advancing the cause of the Jewish labor movement, led as it was by marginally affiliated Jews. Florence Kelley, one of Hull House’s first residents, had begun her illustrious career as the state’s first factory inspector in 1894, becoming an early advocate for Eastern European Jewish workers. Testifying before the United States Industrial Commission in 1899, Kelley concluded:

It is perfectly safe to say that the poorest people working in any trade in Chicago are the people who work in the garment trades. There is no other set of people who are both working and also to so great an extent receiving relief from public and private charity.

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24 Mary Rozet Smith to Esther Loeb Kohn, April 3, 1914, Esther Loeb Kohn Papers, folder 120, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.


Her further findings on the Chicago sweatshops, published in *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (one of Hull House’s earliest efforts to sympathetically present the immigrants’ situation to the public) noted the hypocrisy of inside shop owners who used sweatshops to keep costs down:

A millionaire philanthropist, at the head of one of the largest clothing-houses in the world, was once asked why he did not employ directly the people who made his goods, and furnish them with steam-power, thus saving a heavy drain upon their health, and reducing the number of sweaters’ victims found every winter in his pet hospital.

The unnamed manufacturer’s response was that “[s]o far…we have found leg-power and the sweater cheaper.” Kelley expressed not only sympathy but also solidarity with the “Jewish sweepers’ victims,” whom she regarded as “more temperate, hard-working, and avaricious than any equally large body of wage-earners in America,” and whose sacrifices and suffering in order to improve their families future prospects she saw as “a conclusive refutation of the ubiquitous argument that poverty is the result of crime, vice, intemperance, sloth, and unthrift.”

One of Hull House’s most notable contributions to Chicago’s immigrant working class was its willingness to provide a space for labor organizations to meet. This was no small thing, especially for women workers and organizers: the job of mounting any successful labor action required a more comfortable and acceptable alternative to the saloons that were the only available meeting spaces at the time. Before this was possible, however, Hull House had to earn credibility with Chicago’s labor activists. It did so in 1891, when Addams invited Mary Kenney, president of the women’s bookbinders’ union and one of the city’s first female union leaders, to Hull House for dinner. Kenney initially suspected Addams of being simply another upper-class philanthropist, but Addams proved able to win her over, and the resulting partnership gave Hull House the necessary credibility to host and lend support to a vari-

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ety of labor groups, including the clothing unions. This credibility proved critical to Hull House’s shifting alliances during the first decades of the twentieth century, especially as labor activism rose within the Eastern European Jewish community.

THE 1910 STRIKE, HULL HOUSE, AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Great Strike of 1910 grew out of many causes, some of them pervasive across the industry and others unique to the strike’s originating location: Hart, Schaffner, and Marx. Of the clothing industry’s 38,000 workers, 65 percent were immigrants and 32 percent had immigrant parents. Eastern European Jews, who would end up playing such a large role in the industry’s union leadership, were not the largest ethnic group represented in the workforce, although they constituted a sizeable minority. About half the workforce was female, and while women workers played a significant role in the strike, only Bessie Abramowitz would play a significant leadership role.

For all the problems with HSM’s work environment, Hannah (Annie) Shapiro, one of the instigators of the strike, remembered conditions there as relatively good compared to other places she had worked. The company allowed her to leave early Friday and to stay home on Saturday. But Shapiro, a natural leader, apparently saw enough problems in the workplace that she began speaking to the bosses about the grievances of her co-workers, as well as reporting her own. It was not surprising, therefore, that on September 22, 1910, when she decided that a piece-rate reduction for pocket-sewing from four cents to three-and-a-half cents was unacceptable, she not only walked out, but persuaded sixteen other women to join her. This spontaneous walkout grew into a mass strike that included thousands of workers from several shops across the city. Strike leader and later Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) official Frank Rosenblum recalled that “[i]t was a

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28Mina Carson, Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930 (Chicago, 1990), 77-78; Mary Kenney, “Mary Kenney is Invited In,” in One Hundred Years at Hull-House, 22.

spontaneous rebellion against intolerable conditions….It was a revolu-
tion.”30

At first, however, the action seemed just another instance of what
had become typical wildcat strikes among the Jewish clothing workers.
To date, such walkouts had greatly outpaced workers’ efforts at coordi-
nating an organized strike. Yet as Jacob Potofsky, a future leader of the
ACWA, recalled, word of the initial walkout spread via a Hull House
meeting; five hundred people gathered to air their grievances, after
which Potofsky returned to his shop floor in an effort to convince some
three hundred fellow workers to join him in the growing walkout. The
meeting, which also served as an after-the-fact planning and coordina-
tion session, resulted in the formation of several committees staffed by
the strikers’ Progressive allies. The Pickets Committee, according to
early labor historian Leo Wolman, not only supported the pickets, but
also gave essential “publicity to the outrageous conduct of the police
and strikebreakers”—an act that helped “as much as anything during
the first few weeks towards swinging the weight of public opinion on the
side of the strikers.” Addams would later recall that it was “a matter of
pride to the residents of Hull-House that the first meeting” leading to the
founding of the ACWA “should have been held in one of our rooms,
offered as a refuge to a number of Russian Jewish men and women who
had split off from a Trades Union meeting on the North Side of
Chicago.”31

Even then, many, including future ACWA President Sidney
Hillman, did not take the women seriously, initially regarding them as “a
joke among the men,” until “some ‘bold spirits’”—men and women
alike—joined them. By the end of the first week, strikers numbered in
the hundreds.32 Hillman, who would go on to marry Bessie Abramowitz,
one of the strike’s earliest instigators, was far from alone in his initial
underestimation of the “bold spirits.” Many of the early accounts of the

30“Strike Settled in One Big Plant: 10,000 To Go Back. Hart, Schaffner, & Marx Reach
Agreement with Employees at a Conference,” Chicago Tribune, January 11, 1911; Frank
Rosenblum, interview by Elizabeth Balanoff, August 14, 1970, Columbia Oral History
Collection, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York (hereafter COHC);

31Jane Addams, The Second Twenty Years at Hull House: 1909-1929 (New York, 1930), 290;

32Fraser, Labor Will Rule, 46; Jacob Potofsky, interview by Elizabeth Balanoff, August 4, 1970,
strike, emphasizing the youth and gender of the “girl” strikers, at least implicitly expressed amazement at what the “little garment strikers” were willing to put themselves through in order to protest their increasingly intolerable working conditions. Tribune reporter Harriett Ferrill suggested that the “over 30,000 pale, undersized” strikers were “luxurianting, reveling, delighting in the pleasures of a strike, which is . . . a relaxation from the monotonous grind at the factory all day.”  As the strike progressed, however, few could pretend that the predominantly female strikers’ efforts were either frivolous or a lark, and Ferrill’s tone shifted to emphasize the pathos of the strikers’ situation, including, in one article, an appeal to her readers’ sympathy for “a pretty girl, with big, appealing, brown eyes” who declared in broken English “I cannot speak out in words all those mistreatings I have.”

The strike resulting from the “mistreatings” recounted by this anonymous worker lasted for five months before the national leadership of the United Garment Workers (UGW), the only men’s clothing union at the time, stepped in to broker a premature settlement. During those months, strikers waged a pitched struggle in the face of obstacles ranging from police violence to inadequate funding, especially as supplies of food and coal fell short. As a result, widespread public support and recognition of the essential justice of the striker’s grievances helped to keep the strike going as long as it did. Violence against the strikers, present from the strike’s beginning, only increased with the manufacturer’s importation of out-of-town strikebreakers. The strikebreakers’ presence would become an increasingly complicating factor, as the efforts of hired guards to “protect” them led to further violence against strikers, whom police and press alike frequently blamed for the violence. The magnitude of the violence became especially apparent when two strikers, Charles Lazinskas and Frank Nagrekis, were killed by the police—Lazinskas after he had purportedly attacked a “special policeman” hired by the Royal Tailors.

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33Harriett Ferrill, “When Amie, the Determined Garment Worker, Goes on Strike. With Some of her Companions It Is a Holiday Lark to Defy the ‘Cops’ and the ‘Boss’; With Others It Is a Sorry Fight to Escape the Ignominy of Being Called a ‘Scab,’” Chicago Tribune, November 6, 1910.


35“Garment Strike Gains 112 Firms. From 8,000 to 10,000 Clothing Makers Get Recognition of Their Union,” Chicago Tribune, November 11, 1910; Wolman, Chicago Clothing Workers, 17-20, 30.
Women workers were not spared in the police brutality, and even their upper-class female supporters, notably Starr, were roughed up by the police. Starr vividly recounted one of her run-ins with Chicago police as she sought to assist strikers and to influence a large group of apparent strikebreakers in front of the Price & Co. clothing factory. The strikebreakers had been given police protection, Starr reported, against “a group of three rather small women” that included Emma Steghagen and “Miss S. M. Franklin” as well as herself—all of whom, she added, were “never allowed to stand for an instant, but [were] ordered, usually roughly to ‘move about their business.’” In a characteristic example of her combative assertiveness, Starr proceeded to argue with the police officers. She then recounted:

After a time, a superior officer arrived who was insolent and brutal and absolutely outside his rights, as I was entirely within mine. I was then alone, having separated myself from the girls, and was simply walking back and forth in front of the factory. After roughly asking me, ‘who are you?’ and ‘What are you doing here’ and hearing that I was simply a citizen of the United States and settlement worker here in the interest of justice and fair play, he informed me that if I passed by once more I would be sent to the station.

Starr retreated, but the police continued to take every measure possible to “protect” the strikebreakers, ensuring that “no pickets should be allowed to speak to them.” Starr called the spectacle “a heart sickening sight” to a proud descendant of Ethan Allen and “an American since 1632.”36 If other female strike supporters were less openly confrontational than she, they were, according to one report, “given no more con-

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sideration than the regular pickets” by the police, whether they were other settlement workers, Chicago Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) activists, or “college girls”; several were “grabbed by the arm and shoved along by the unsympathetic bluecoats.”

With winter approaching and neither side apparently willing to give, pressure to settle the strike came from a growing number of outside groups, including a “Citizens’ Committee” that would work closely with the WTUL, arguing that, according to Maureen Flanagan, “a just solution to the strike was not only important for the striking employees,” but even more importantly “for the welfare of the city.” The committee appointed Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch as its head. In this role, Hirsch would reveal the tension that, for many Progressives, lay between their lofty ideals and a more visceral disdain for some of the same people whom they sought to uplift. Hirsch, during his long and illustrious career as rabbi of the prestigious Sinai Temple, frequently served as the de facto conscience of the city’s German Jewish community; his writings and sermons often “touched on the special duties that capitalists and men of wealth owed to society.”

Hirsch played an essentially prophetic role in relation to the German Jewish community’s response to the strike. As rabbi, he commanded the attention of a number of leading clothing manufacturers who belonged to Sinai Temple, and his reach also extended further, through both his public writing and his chairing of the Citizens’ Committee (the German Jewish members of which were, according to Steven Fraser, ashamed enough of their coreligionists to declare the strike “thoroughly justified”). Yet Hirsch may have maintained his credibility with the clothing manufacturers because his attitude towards the Eastern European Jewish community scarcely differed from theirs. Like them, he felt a genuine sense of responsibility towards and concern for his coreligionists, mixed with a healthy dose of paternalism and sometimes barely disguised contempt.

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39 Peter M. Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald: The Man who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the South (Bloomington, Ind., 2006), 54.
Hirsch revealed this ambivalence in his public declaration that the walkout was likely “a manifestation of ‘Jewish emotionalism,’” arguing that “if there is a basis for the strike, the committee will endeavor to adjust it,” but that if it were “merely an attempt on the part of a few to organize the workers I would not consider the cause to be an altogether worthy one.” Hirsch then surmised that “the strike is an emotional affair, such as Jewish people, especially Jewish women are easy prey to.” Yet, perhaps anticipating or responding to the protestations of non-Jewish elite women such as Starr, he also remarked that “If one talks about the wrongs of the Jewish race and appeals to them on the strength of this argument, the wrong they suffer now, either real or imaginary—it is not difficult in this way to arouse the sympathy of Jewish people as well as others,” but that it would be “our larger purpose to bring all of these factions together on a common basis and try to reestablish peace as quickly as possible.”

Several Hull House residents, but none more so than Starr, involved themselves in nearly all phases of strike support, joining the WTUL and other upper-class activist groups. In order to reach the middle class and because of the background of the most prominent activists, they emphasized the then-normative themes of the sanctity of motherhood, childhood, and the home, and the threats to all of these by an industrial system that kept women toiling in the sweatshops. They may also have been trying to highlight the very real needs of the 5,000 infant children of unemployed strikers, including the 1,250 “strike babies” born during this time. One committee member likened the starvation of the babies and small children to the Biblical “slaughter of the innocents,” while Addams, arguing that the children “have done nothing wrong whether their parents have or not,” saw it as a matter of duty “to take care of them until the strike is settled or their parents have secured employment.” While few would have argued against the innocence and helplessness of the young children suffering from the vicissitudes of the strike, appealing for public sympathy on the basis of the women workers’ helplessness was a somewhat different matter. Residents’ attitudes

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reflected their ignorance of the acceptability of women’s work outside the home among Eastern European Jewish households. As Fraser has pointed out, “for Jewish immigrant women particularly,” who had gained a sense of status, equality, and respect for their breadwinning role otherwise unavailable in traditional Eastern European Jewish society, “the high-flown language of the League must have seemed strange, or at least to have missed the point.” Yet during the establishment phase of the new garment workers’ union, the WTUL would play a critical role in the development of stable unionism. By working with Hillman and Abramowitz to educate the rank and file in the methods of a unionism that avoided wildcat strikes, established self-government, and adjusted grievances peacefully through union-appointed representatives, the League helped to pave the way for the separate HSM agreement.

By the time of its sudden conclusion, the strike had cost the WTUL and the Chicago Federation of Labor nearly $54,000, mostly for daily meal tickets for strikers’ families. Funds came from a variety of sources, including other labor organizations and the Socialist press. Jewish organizations and the general public also came forward to help; their contributions included $150 from the German Jewish clothing house of Kuh, Nathan, and Fischer, sent on the condition that “all of it should go to the very poor & suffering” and that “none of it by any chance fall into the hands of the cutters!” who were among those on strike. Starr disparaged as “the most sublime form of effrontery” the firm’s effort to “state to an attentive public that so far from being indifferent to the suffering” that they had helped create, “they themselves would feed the starving people which these unprincipled labor leaders had forcibly prevented from earning bread for their families.”

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43 “Mayor’s Demand is Arbitration. Busse Urges Garment Workers and Employers to Submit Their Case to a ‘Strike Court,’” Chicago Tribune, December 9, 1910; “Milk is Promised for Strike Babes. 7,000 Real Sufferers in Garment Workers’ Walkout Will Get Aid or Funds,” Chicago Tribune, November 28, 1910; Fraser, Labor Will Rule, 60-61, 72-73; Weiler, “Walkout,” 245.
Most of the relief contributions coming from Chicago’s larger Jewish community were characterized by far less chutzpah than the house of Kuh, Nathan, and Fischer’s outrageous offer. In the early days of the strike, the Jewish Courier reported that “the present garment workers strike not only has interested the Jewish West and North Siders of Chicago,” but “the entire Jewish element of the city is considerably wrought up over the strike situation.” Notably, most of the sympathy went towards the strikers, and when the Courier announced a benefit concert sponsored by the Garment Strikers’ Aid Society, it did not fail to note that “a Northwest Side physician promised to donate double the amount of the intake of this concert,” or to urge “every Jewish person who knows the conditions and the plight of these needy workers to help all he possibly can” as well as to “induce the West Side physicians to do the same charitable act that this doctor on the Northwest Side did.” This active support was joined by the efforts of Chicago’s Progressive elite. The Yiddish paper, The World, later recalled that “ministers, rabbis, university professors, bankers, all joined in the work of the striking tailors” through public speaking, writing, and fundraising.\(^4^5\)

Ellen Gates Starr would eventually emerge as a self-appointed prophet. She admonished German Jewish clothing manufacturers using references both to the Bible and to the history of Jewish oppression, and earned an unusual degree of praise from the strikers who were, as Addams put it, “always rather sensitive in regard to the assistance of outsiders.” Yet Starr’s activism differed from her colleagues less in kind than in degree. Other Hull House residents and Chicago Progressives, working individually and collectively, offered critical financial and moral support for the striking garment workers.\(^4^6\) Their support did not go unappreciated by the strikers or their leaders. As Sidney Hillman later wrote, in a memorial tribute to Grace Abbott:

> Conditions had been intolerable; our organization had just been launched—its treasury was empty, its friends few, the newspapers biased, the police hostile, the employees set upon its destruc-

\(^4^5\)The World, October 13, 1916; and “The Public Stew,” The Daily Jewish Courier, December 9, 1910, both CFLPS.

\(^4^6\)Addams, Second Twenty Years, 290-91; Daniel Levine, Jane Addams and the Liberal Tradition (Madison, Wis., 1971), 162-67; Stebner, Women of Hull House, 92-95.
Addams began her support rather conservatively, focusing on relief for needy strikers, but eventually developed a close partnership with Hillman, who by then shared with her both the belief that “industrial warfare” was a cause of great waste, and a conviction of the necessity of seeking other ways to work out labor–management disputes. This partnership, balanced with Addams’s close ties to the HSM management, gave her vital credibility as an intermediary between the workers and the management at HSM. According to Daniel Levine, one of her earlier biographers, it was Addams who persuaded HSM’s chief negotiator Earl Dean Howard, and through him Joseph Schaffner, that this “was no ordinary strike, but a spontaneous, leaderless revolution based on long-standing hatreds and injustices.” This strong statement, which became part of Howard’s report, moved Schaffner to offer his workers a settlement that was more generous than both his own previous offers and those of other clothing houses. Even so, it took Hillman’s persuasion for the HSM workers to accept it in the face of opposition fomented by members of the International Workers of the World. 48

The Hull House residents’ efforts on behalf of a predominantly Eastern European Jewish labor movement were not conducted lightly. Many prominent members of the German Jewish community, including most of the garment manufacturers and their friends and allies, were also visible supporters of Hull House and its constituent organizations. While they clearly shared many of the concerns of the Hull House Progressives, and while many managed to maintain a level of graciousness that won the respect of the very activists who opposed them,

48 Interview, Irving Abrams by Frank Ninovich, Oral History Collection of the Labor Movement, YIVO Archives; Jacob Potofsky Interview, COHC; and Levine, Addams and the Liberal Tradition, 162-63.
Chicago’s German Jewish leaders found themselves at odds with their erstwhile allies on this issue.

A poignant example was Julius Rosenwald, who served on the board of the Immigrants’ Protective League alongside Grace Abbott and her sister Edith, also a noted Progressive reformer. Although Rosenwald (unlike Joseph Schaffner) always remained officially at odds with the Jewish labor movement and always insisted on a firm separation between business and charity, the philanthropy for which he became nationally famous was justly recognized by the Progressive activists with whom he regularly interacted. Additionally, over time, he had reason to be proud of the working conditions and environment he created at the helm of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Rosenwald could undoubtedly have ended up as simply one of the richer philanthropists in Chicago, who urged others to give generously. But the level to which he took his philanthropy also indicates the strong influence of leading Chicago Progressives, from Addams and the Abbott sisters to the spiritual leader of his own community, Rabbi Hirsch. As a result, Rosenwald often found himself forced to tread a thin line between supporting the efforts of the Chicago Progressives, including the Immigrants’ Protective League (with which he worked in close partnership with Grace Abbott), and defending his own business practices and public image.  

Edith Abbott wrote in her unpublished memoir, “The Hull House Years,” that “Mr. Rosenwald didn’t agree with Grace about trade-unions, and we all felt very sorry during the garment workers’ strike to think that he wasn’t with us.” The situation was made additionally uncomfortable, Abbott wrote, because “some of the girls who came to the meetings at Hull House were from the shops of Mr. Rosenwald’s company.” Rosenwald undoubtedly suffered additional embarrassment when the Tribune reported that “nearly 100 girls at the Sears, Roebuck & Co. plant joined the strike,” walking out, ironically, “because of a rule against ‘piece work,’ a system under which they earned as much as $18 a week, and the announcement of a salary of figure of $12.” During one unusually long-running board meeting of the Immigrants’ Protective League that took place during the strike, Abbott wrote, sister Grace extricated herself in order to go and make a speech in support of the strikers. As she headed out into the cold, Rosenwald apprehended her,

“Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald, 56-61; M. R. Werner, Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian (New York, 1939), 78-81, 86-94, 158.
saying, “I know where you’re going and I know I wouldn’t agree with what you’re going to say if I heard you. But I want you to get there safely.” “In spite of her protests,” wrote Edith, Rosenwald accompanied Grace down the stairs and called his chauffeured car to take her to her speech. The two remained lifelong friends despite their differences; Edith also admitted that “it was hard to be against Mr. Rosenwald as it were,” making the distinction that “we were only against his policy as an employer and not against him personally.”

SETTLING WITH HSM AND FOUNDING THE ACWA

By early December, the strikers had won enough public sympathy to convince Hart, Schaffner, and Marx to negotiate. The company had agreed to two “peace propositions,” both of which were rejected, one by the workers for its punitive nature, the other by the Manufacturers’ Association, which truculently declared that there was “nothing to arbitrate.” The agreement that the clothing workers finally managed to negotiate with the comparatively forward-looking HSM did not include union recognition. Not surprisingly, many rank-and-file strikers found its terms unacceptable, and voted accordingly. A vocal minority, consisting mostly of non-Jewish workers, was especially eager to denounce not only the settlement, but also the strike leaders, who had allowed the agreement. Only by force of Hillman’s persuasion was the majority able to prevail on dissenters to ratify the HSM agreement as an important first step. There was no avoiding the fact, however, that it was a very small step, for it only ended the strike at HSM. As the winter wore on and spirits flagged, Thomas Rickert, the president of the UGW, used his office to unilaterally end the strike, behind the backs of the strikers, their leaders, and the Conference Board.

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Why, given its inconclusive ending, did this particular walkout create a movement that lasted well beyond the strike, when nearly all its predecessors had petered out? One key factor was that it involved a company that was comparatively progressive in its outlook, a firm that—while rejecting a closed shop—recognized the potential advantages of maintaining order and discipline through the consent of the governed. 53 Joseph Schaffner, one of HSM’s founders, was particularly affected by the strike and the resulting negative publicity. Testifying before the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, which had been investigating conditions in the industry, he fully acknowledged the general discontent prior to the strike:

Careful study of the situation has led me to the belief that the fundamental cause of the strike was that the workers had no satisfactory channel through which minor grievances, exactions, and petty tyrannies of underbosses could be taken up and amicably adjusted....The result was there steadily grew up in the minds of many of feeling of distrust and enmity towards their immediate superiors...because they felt that justice was being denied them. If they had the temerity to complain against a boss, they incurred his displeasure, and his word was taken in preference to theirs. In some instances they lost their jobs, and where this was not the case they seldom received any satisfaction.

Schaffner acknowledged his earlier ignorance of this state of affairs, admitting that just days prior to the strike he “was so badly informed of the conditions” that he “called the attention of a friend to the satisfactory state of the employees.” On learning the truth about the conditions in his own factories, he testified, he had concluded that if anything, “the strike should have occurred much sooner.” 54 This belated empathy may well have played a role in his willingness to negotiate with the union representatives, even if on a limited basis.

Although in the short term the strikers achieved far less than they had sought, long-term gains were to come out of the immediate defeat,

53 Fraser, Labor Will Rule, 55-56.
54 Joseph Schaffner, “Testimony Before the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations,” extract, quoted in Fraser, Labor Will Rule, 51.
both for the union and for labor–management relations across the industry. Chicago clothing workers had plenty of reason to believe that they had received a raw deal at the hands of the national UGW leadership, which consisted predominantly of native-born overalls-makers. The resulting showdown at the 1914 UGW convention in Nashville, Tennessee, led to a “breakaway convention” and to the founding of a new organization of men’s clothing workers that would become the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, with Sidney Hillman chosen as the organization’s first president almost by acclamation.35

Even with Hillman’s leadership, however, founding a new union would involve much more than simply organizing and declaring. From its beginnings in October 1914, the “new United Garment Workers” union faced a variety of problems, including a lawsuit over its name that tied up both finances and attention. When the legal wrangling was finally settled, Rickert’s UGW maintained control of the rights to the name and to the organization’s treasury and New York headquarters, but thanks to the help of lawyer Clarence Darrow, the new organization did manage to maintain the property of the UGW’s Chicago District Council and several other locals. The group also won a release from all other legal claims in exchange for agreeing to change its name, settling on the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.36

THE 1915 STRIKE AND SHIFTING ALLIANCES

The newly chartered garment workers’ union had not been in existence long when the half-expected second garment workers’ strike erupted in 1915.37 It had begun with the ACWA’s peaceful efforts to persuade other clothing manufacturers to adopt labor agreements similar to those enjoyed by the HSM workers. The union sent letters to two hundred clothing houses requesting meetings between their heads and the

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36Anzunio Mariempietri to Jacob Potolsky, November 25, 1914, Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America Files, box 13, folder 15, LMDA; Epstein, Jewish Labor in the U.S.A., 2:44; and Josephson, Sidney Hillman, 102-107.

37Josephson, Sidney Hillman, 118.
ACWA leaders “for the purpose of arbitrating difficulties which have arisen.” As Edith Wyatt reported in Harper’s Weekly, the ACWA’s correspondence “received no reply from the majority of the recipients,” except for a few who freely admitted to the press that they had simply thrown the letters in the trash. Significantly, the workers were calling for and publicizing their willingness to embrace the arbitration process that had proven so successful at HSM, while the manufacturers remained staunchly unwilling to negotiate. The attorney representing the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers’ Association, Martin J. Isaacs, publicly insisted that there was no reason to arbitrate and that there was no reason for the union to go on strike, save for the agitation of union leaders. Hillman spent hours negotiating with Jacob Abt, then the head of the Wholesale Clothiers Manufacturer’s Association, to no avail.58

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The strike officially began on September 27, 1915, at the prearranged signals of the shop chairmen. Despite Hillman’s strict orders prohibiting violence on the part of the strikers, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported 493 acts of violence, including what Wyatt described as “the most cowardly and brutal attacks on strike-breakers,—three persons against one, the beating of girls, the throwing of acid.” Displaying a balance apparently absent from the *Tribune* report, Wyatt also pointed out that “the report mentioned no violences as perpetrated against strikers” despite the fact that “many of the names and addresses on the list of sufferers from violence were known to be those of strikers.”

The level of police brutality in 1915 exceeded even that of the 1910 strike. Officers drove motorcycles into crowds of strikers—prompting comparisons with the police in Russia—and arrested and jailed nearly two thousand people by the time the strike was concluded. Mayor William Hale “Big Bill” Thompson steadfastly refused to rein in the excesses of the force. The situation reached a new low on October 27, 1915, when officers suddenly charged a crowd assembled near the union’s headquarters—and near one of the factories located at the corner of Harrison and Halsted Streets. A deaf tailor, Samuel Kapper, failed to get away fast enough, and was shot in cold blood, despite later police claims of having fired in self-defense. Ten thousand men, women, and children marched in Kapper’s funeral procession, and the sight of these crowds further influenced public opinion.

On November 10, an estimated 1,000 strikers and supporters marched together to city hall for court appearances, only to be released on their own recognizance when the crowd proved too large for the courtroom. Although Mayor Thompson himself remained largely unresponsive to the complaints of the strikers and their supporters, their efforts did eventually lead to an investigation of the police that led in turn to lasting reform. Starr, writing in her unpublished “Reflections on the Recent Chicago Strike of Clothing Workers,” observed that “[i]t is not difficult to see why the mayor, whose interest was vivid in the strike of street car men (mostly voters) in the preceding June, was ossified indifference in this one.” Highlighting the differences that distinguished

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this strike from the previous summer’s streetcar strike, Starr added that the mayor “turned a deaf ear to all approaches of well-known individuals, representatives of labor, of women’s social and political organizations, of settlements, church federations.” His response to their calls for arbitration, she dramatically proclaimed, was “violence.”

Yet Starr and her settlement colleagues persisted in their highly public support of the strike, doing everything from walking the picket line to providing food and clothing to strikers’ families who were in need. Union leader Potofsky wrote of Starr’s tireless efforts that “I recall her visits to my office at 818 Harrison Street with bundles of old clothing under her arm, which she collected from her wealthy friends and asking for addresses of sick and needy striking families she might help,” adding that Starr “was on the job day and night.” In December 1915, after the strike’s termination, Hillman wrote Starr to thank her for her support and for “sympathy of the active and not the passive kind shown by some other good friends.” Hillman noted that she had taken her place “on the firing line, and personally bore the insults of the police and private slingers of the employers,” and inspired others by her “very presence and example.”

This visible support from the Hull House activists and other elite women played an important role in both shoring up and spreading general public support for the strikers, as well as in turning up the pressure on the employers. Starr noted that “[t]he strike was written of in several magazines,” and that even those local dailies “naturally disposed in favor of those who advertise, gave it more fair publicity than usual.” Yet Starr also admitted that “in many respects this strike was like others” because “there was the same array of money power, press power, police power, against the relative powerlessness of the dispossessed, and the unfranchised.” She added that “sixty percent of the strikers were women, and even a larger percent of the men were not voters.”

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62 Jacob S. Potofsky, “Happy Birthday to Ellen Gates Starr,” 1939, Ellen Gates Starr Papers, folder 1, SSC.

63 Sidney Hillman to Ellen Gates Starr, December 22, 1915, Ellen Gates Starr Papers, SSC.

64 Ellen Gates Starr, “Reflections on the Recent Chicago Strike of Clothing Workers,” Ellen Gates Starr Papers, SSC.
ACWA’s continued push for arbitration was joined by no less than Addams, the State Board of Mediation, and the Aldermanic Committee, had no effect on the Manufacturers’ Association, and was additionally greeted by what Wolman describes as “specious and evasive statements” from Chicago Mayor Thompson. The Hull House activists, for their part, unabashedly threw their support behind the strikers, and Addams made a last, futile plea to the mayor for arbitration, admonishing him that “if you could be induced to take a hand in the matter we would be able to make some order out of chaos.”

Speaking (and writing) even more forcefully was Addams’s long-time friend Starr, who with Florence Kelley had also become the most avowedly Socialist resident of Hull House. Starr admonished Jacob Abt, the German Jewish clothier, president of the Wholesale Clothiers Manufacturers’ Association, and benefactor of the Maxwell Street Settlement, by drawing on two tenets of Jewish culture: a belief in social justice and an abhorrence of “un-American persecution” of Jews by their fellow Jews. Starr took Abt to task for refusing to meet with her “until after the strike is over” (if at all). Noting that a young boy at the Maxwell Street settlement had thought she was Jewish because she seemed to be “always fighting for the Jews,” she drily added that she was simultaneously fighting against them. Abt’s previous experience as a settlement worker, she informed him, made him more accountable than others “for the needless horrors that are taking place.” Drawing on Jewish scripture, Starr noted that “[w]hen Isaiah rebukes the ‘oppressor,’ the unfair employer…he does so in these terms…‘What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces and grind the faces of the poor’”—a passage that, in its “strong language on the side of the weak and oppressed and against the privileged,” was “very different from the language and the attitude of the police and of the daily press.” Starr then warned Abt:

A persecution of the Jews, by the Jews as relentless as any the world affords, is going on in our own midst. Slowly Americans, real Americans by birth and tradition, are learning what that means. Slowly they are seeing with their own eyes what the poor foreigners, who are coming to us, as you once came, for freedom and equality of opportunity, are suffering from the perversion of

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65 Wolman, *Chicago Clothing Workers*, 102, 104, 165.
justice, which wealth amassed in our midst...has brought. And as they learn a great protest is rising. You will hear the echo of that protest and your children will hear it years hence.  

Abt’s initial response is not recorded, but Starr’s open letter received enough publicity to serve as another visible embarrassment to German Jewish manufacturers like Abt who had stood determined not to arbitrate with their Eastern European coreligionists.

The rising tide of public support did not, however, finally translate into success in inducing manufacturers to settle. On December 12, 1915, with both sides visibly worn down, the union reluctantly called off its strike. The confrontation had essentially ended in a draw, with no general union recognition, but with concessions from many manufacturers, and the confidence that recognition would soon be forthcoming. Hillman wrote to Starr in late December 1915 that while the clothing workers had not won all they fought for, they had nonetheless gained something: “Life is a compromise, anyway, and we are satisfied if we have taken a little step forward. We gave our employers a good fight and as you know our retreat was far from being an unconditional surrender” because “our people return to work as union men and women, with faith in their organization and full of hope and courage for the future.”

THE STRIKE’S AFTERMATH

Hillman, as Fraser noted, had viewed (and orchestrated) the strike as an “organizing strike’ to boost morale and to establish the supremacy of the ACW over the UGW” in one of the nation’s most important clothing markets. In the end he accomplished just that, with a marked increase in the organization of Chicago’s clothing industry that left more than ninety clothing houses under contract by the time the strike was settled. Although this figure still represented only one-quarter of the city’s clothing workers—and most of those in the HSM shops—Fraser

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66 “Abt Attacked in Open Letter by Ellen Starr: Hull House Worker Charges ‘Persecution’ in Denouncing Garment Employer” and “Quotes from Israel,” Ellen Gates Starr Papers, SSC; and Ellen Gates Starr to Jacob Abt, November 23, 1915, ACWA Files, LMDA.
67 Wolman, Chicago Clothing Workers, 104; Josephson, Sidney Hillman, 130-31.
68 Hillman to Starr, December 22, 1915, Ellen Gates Starr Papers, SSC.
writes that “never again would this second most important market in the
industry be a haven for the open shop.” While Chicago lagged far
behind New York in terms of the general organization of its clothing
workers, HSM provided both an important local model and a nucleus for
the rapid unionization that would take place by the end of the decade. 69

Joseph Schaffner was remembered in the end not merely as the
founder of one of the most consistently successful men’s clothing hous-
es in the United States, but as a pioneer in labor-management relations.
As one eulogist explained in a published tribute:

Mr. Schaffner lived for ideals; he helped every man who came
under his influence to be a better man…. He helped to make the
clothing business, not only his own business, but that of the cus-
tomers of the house, and even that of the competitors, cleaner,
better, higher in tone. He helped to make the relations between
employer and employee better, sweeter, more human. 70

His willingness to seek labor peace and to deal with the union in a way
that none of his colleagues had done won him the accolades of
Chicagoans from all classes. Following his death on April 19, 1918, the
Amalgamated requested that all HSM employees attend the funeral; the
company not only requested the same, but also granted its employees a
day of paid leave. 71 Yet Schaffner, the liberal pioneer, paid a high price,
according to Chicago Jewish historian Phillip Bregstone: “The members
of the National Manufacturers Association [sic] were so embittered
against Mr. Schaffner for his liberal views on labor problems that they
ever forgave him.” Schaffner’s less enlightened colleagues, Bregstone
adds, “succeeded in avenging themselves when Mr. Schaffner made
application for membership in a certain club to which many of them
belonged,” refusing him membership “[b]ecause of his progressive and

69 Fraser, Labor Will Rule, 99, 101; Josephson, Sidney Hillman, 116-17; and Weiler, “Walkout,”
249.
70 Joseph Schaffner, 1848-1918: Recollections and Impressions of His Associates (Chicago,
1920), 135
71 “Joseph Schaffner is Dead,” Sunday Jewish Courier, April 21, 1918, CFLPS.
humane ideas.” Over time, the embrace of Schaffner’s “progressive and humane ideas” of giving organized labor a significant role in maintaining industrial order would enjoy an increasingly wide currency—especially, it should be noted, among Chicago’s Jewish working class itself.

CONCLUSION: OUTGROWING ALLIANCES

The strikes and other developments in the lives of Chicago’s working-class Jewish residents clearly did not take place in a vacuum. Rather, the changes that spread from the workplace to the community organizations were brought about by the efforts not only of radicals and unionists, but also of Jewish organizations, prominent German Jewish leaders, and non-Jewish progressive activists. During the formative decade of the ACWA, visible change was taking place within the city’s established German Jewish community. Stirred by the activism of their “inferior” coreligionists, a number of German Jewish leaders—both rabbinic and lay—were forced to rethink long-held assumptions about Eastern European Jews and their relationship to them, both as givers of charity and as employers. Although few of these leaders transcended their class biases, most reflected to some degree the influence of the Progressive movement on Chicago’s Jewish community.

The successes of the ACWA served as an impetus for further labor organization across the trades within Chicago’s Eastern European Jewish community and for the strengthening of the UHT. By the 1920s, Chicago’s Eastern European Jewish community included a rising and increasingly confident middle class. The success of communal leaders such as Bernard Horwich, who had gotten their start as “cultural brokers” to their own community, played a vital role in helping the Eastern European Jewish community gain co-equal status. The shifting alliances between Hull House and the two communities—its settlement workers simultaneously advocates for the Eastern European Jewish community and the conscience of the German Jewish community—made the center an increasingly marginal force to both communities. This was especial-

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72 Phillip Bregstone, Chicago and Its Jews: A Cultural History (Chicago, 1933), 210. Bregstone may have referred either to the Standard Club or the Concordia Club, both of which were known for their well-off German-American Jewish membership.


74 Lissak, Pluralism and Progressives, 88-89.
ly true by 1923 when, with the merger of the United Jewish Charities and the Federated Orthodox Jewish Charities to form the Jewish Charities of Chicago, the two communities began the process of forming new alliances as more equal partners in what was increasingly becoming one Jewish community.75