

“Organize Everything That Works”:**An Analysis of Two Early Twentieth Century Strikes in Bayonne, New Jersey****By Sophia Burns****DOI: [10.14713/njs.v11i2.365](https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v11i2.365)**

Abstract: Despite the city’s location within the New York metropolitan area, unionism in Bayonne, New Jersey, is not well represented in the labor history canon. This article examines two strikes that took place in Bayonne within a year of each other: the 1912 silk workers’ strike at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill and the 1913 capmakers’ strike at the Herman Bros. factory. The Schwarzenbach-Huber mill was owned by an international company with multiple locations, while the Herman Bros. factory was operated by a single family with personal ties to the strikers. Various Progressive-era phenomena can be observed in the events of these strikes, such as the growth of the labor movement, widespread immigration, and the rise of women in the workplace. In this way, Bayonne acts as a microcosm of New Jersey during the 1910s and shows historical trends as they unfolded in real time.

Introduction

On March 30, 1912, Arthur Reimer, a member of an industrial union and leader of silk workers’ strikes in Hudson County, told a reporter from the *Jersey Journal* that the goal of his union was “to organize everything that works in this county.”¹ Reimer’s sentiment is indicative of organizers’ fervent efforts to organize workers in the industrial United States during the first

¹ “Vote on General Textile Strike,” *Jersey Journal* (Jersey City: New Jersey), Mar. 26, 1912.

decades of the twentieth century. For many more radical unions, unionization was a stepping stone toward the abolition of capitalism. The practical efficacy of collective bargaining made strikes and the formation of unions an appealing option for workers of various political strains, though; the old adage that there is power in numbers is easily understood. In 1912 and 1913, this principle manifested itself in two strikes in Bayonne, New Jersey, at a silk mill and a cap factory, respectively.

The strike at the silk mill began on the morning of March 13, 1912, when two hundred young women employed at the Schwarzenbach-Huber Company's Bayonne factory walked out, demanding an increase in wages and a shorter working day in exchange for their return.² It would be roughly five weeks before the strike truly came to an end in Bayonne, but it had spread throughout Hudson County and managed to affect the operations of eighteen mills in the meantime.³ On March 29th of the following year, the workers at the Herman Brothers hat and cap factory went on strike when their bosses ignored their recently formed union in favor of hiring nonunion workmen.⁴ This strike, bolstered by the support of a more militant union, lasted into the fall of that year but ultimately fizzled out as workers failed to wrest union recognition from the owners of the factory.⁵ Both the Schwarzenbach-Huber and Herman Bros. factories would see another strike before the decade's end, showing the unfinished nature of the initial walkouts.⁶ Studying these obscure events in the local history of Bayonne provides an unexpectedly rich view of several convergent trends in the Progressive-era United States. The Bayonne Schwarzenbach-

² "Two Hundred Girls Strike in Bayonne," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 13, 1912.

³ "Silk Strike Ended," *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 20, 1912; "Mill Owners Lock 30,000 Hands Out," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 26, 1912.

⁴ "Bright Bayonettes," *The Bayonne Herald and Greenville Register* (Bayonne: New Jersey), Mar. 29, 1913.

⁵ "Letter to the Editor," *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times* (Bayonne: New Jersey), Oct. 06, 1916.

⁶ "Fourteen Girls on Strike for Half Day on Sunday," *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Sep. 13, 1916; "900 Girls at Silk Mill Quit Want Big Raise," Mar. 08, 1917.

Huber and Herman Bros. strikes show the effects of broad societal changes such as increased immigration, the rising number of women in the workforce, and the growth of the labor movement playing out at the local level.

This article is the first study of the two strikes in question; however, it is also part of a larger movement within the discipline of labor history to unearth the stories of forgotten strikes and activists. In her 2010 book *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* Jennifer Guglielmo sought to uncover the rich history of radical labor activism found among Italian immigrant women and their daughters. Guglielmo moves these women, deemed “unorganizable” in their time, from the margins of our understanding to the center, arguing that “participation in the anarchist movement was just one of many ways that Italian immigrant women and their daughters survived the challenges of the early twentieth century with their spirits intact.”⁷ Rose Schneiderman, a Jewish labor activist, echoed a similar sentiment in her autobiography, writing that after joining a union “a new life opened up for me. All of a sudden I was not lonely anymore. I had shop and executive-board meetings to attend.”⁸ Though, to my knowledge, no women strikers involved in either the Schwarzenbach-Huber or Herman Bros. strikers were anarchists, my research suggests that joining a union was likely a similarly enriching experience for them.

As recently as 2021, historian Jacob Zumoff wrote *The Red Thread: The Passaic Textile Strike* about a 1926 strike in the wool works of Passaic, New Jersey. In his study he argues that “what made the Passaic strike unique was that in many ways it was not unique,” elaborating that the strike brought attention to “common issues, while demonstrating that workers could struggle

⁷ Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 3; 2.

⁸ Rose Schneiderman and Lucy Goldthwaite, *All for One* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1967), 50.

against them.”⁹ My research suggests that the same was true of the Schwarzenbach-Huber and Herman Bros. strikes in Bayonne, which are important for the ways in which they stand as embodiments of their time and place.

Though there have been several works written covering labor in Bayonne, they have primarily focused on male immigrant workers during the 1915 and 1916 strikes at the Standard Oil refinery. The two chief examples of this are “The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey 1915–1925” by John J. Bukowczyk and “Class Formation and the State: Class, Status, and Political-Economy of an American Industrial City” by John A. DeBrizzi. DeBrizzi briefly references both the Herman Bros. strike and the Schwarzenbach-Huber strike in his article but, unfortunately, also states several of the details incorrectly.¹⁰ Bukowczyk, meanwhile, focused on Bayonne’s Polish immigrants and their involvement with the Standard Oil strike, describing the city’s population as “heavily Polish.”¹¹

While Bayonne certainly did have a prominent Polish community, in this paper I seek to show the true breadth of cultural backgrounds represented within the walls of Bayonne’s factories. Additionally, the strikes at the Herman Bros. and Schwarzenbach-Huber factories illustrate that, far from being anomalies in the city’s history, the 1915 and 1916 Standard Oil strikes were indicative of a ferment of unionism already boiling over in early twentieth century Bayonne. Essentially, the issues of unsafe working conditions and long hours with low pay that led to the Standard Oil strikes were present in factories across Bayonne, and the state of New Jersey at large.

⁹ Jacob Zumoff, *The Red Thread: The Passaic Textile Strike* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 4.

¹⁰ DeBrizzi mistakenly wrote that the Herman Bros. strike began in April and that the Schwarzenbach-Huber strike took place during 1913. John A. DeBrizzi, “Class Formation and the State: Class, Status, and the Political-Economy of an American Industrial City.” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 26 (1981): 128-129.

¹¹ John J. Bukowczyk, “The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey 1915–1925.” *Labor History* 25, no. 1 (1984): 55.

Historical Context

The United States

In the several decades leading up to the strikes at the Schwarzenbach-Huber and Herman Bros. factories, the United States saw rapid population growth as a result of widespread immigration. Unlike previous immigrants to the U.S. who had primarily come from northern Europe, the majority of these so-called “new immigrants” were eastern and southeastern European.¹² A web of factors contributed to this sudden spike in transatlantic migration, but perhaps the most pressing was caused by a domino effect set in motion by population growth. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, Europe’s population experienced a surge of growth that spread from the western to eastern side of the continent. This population boom was essentially the consequence of an improved diet and lower mortality rate. However, as more rural peasants saw their families enlarging, the amount of land suitable for agriculture remained stagnant. Following the law of supply and demand, plots of land that would otherwise be relatively low in value became expensive, meaning that peasants had to look elsewhere for their livelihoods. Even skilled rural craftsmen began feeling the pull of urban labor markets as the industrial economy upended traditional local competition. Historian David Gerber states that the population of the United States would have been only 60 percent of what it was by 1940 without the transformative level of international immigration that it received.¹³

This new wave of immigration brought changes in demographics and settlement patterns with it. As opposed to the young families that emigrated during the mid-nineteenth century, single

¹² James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880–1930,” in *History from the Bottom Up and the Inside Out: Ethnicity, Race, and Identity in Working-Class History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 999.

¹³ David Gerber, *American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 73-78.

men looking for employment in urban areas were more frequent travelers in the late-nineteenth century. These young men often sailed back home to Europe after earning money at work in the States, earning them the moniker “birds of passage.”¹⁴ There were plenty of exceptions to this transience, though. Rates of re-emigration were much lower in populations escaping untenable living conditions in their homelands. For example, the community of eastern European Jews on New York’s Lower East Side was firmly settled, having come to the United States to escape “anti-Semitism and Tsarist oppression.” The Lower East Side would go on to become a nucleus of union organization due in no small part to the traditions brought overseas by these immigrants.¹⁵

When newly arrived immigrants entered the workforce, they encountered a United States industrial economy that was expanding as a result of factors like technological innovation, increased prosperity, and growing cities.¹⁶ In his article “The Progressives, the Immigrant, and the Workplace: Defining Public Perceptions, 1900-1914,” James S. Pula claims that “by the end of the nineteenth century the United States enjoyed the largest and most rapidly growing economy in the world.”¹⁷ Of course, the United States was not the only nation experiencing economic growth at the hands of global industrial capitalism during this period. The world market’s expansion facilitated the international relocation of laborers within a single industry; this phenomenon will become particularly relevant later on in the case of the Schwarzenbach-Huber company.¹⁸

Immigrants in need of work satisfied American industry’s appetite for cheap labor, but they were perceived as a threat by many in the organized labor movement. Many unionists feared that

¹⁴ Gerber, *American Immigration*, 82-83.

¹⁵ James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 7; 31.

¹⁶ Green, *World of the Worker*, 6.

¹⁷ Pula, “Defining Public Perceptions,” 60.

¹⁸ Patrizia Sione, “Patterns of International Migrations: Italian Silk Workers in New Jersey, USA,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 17, no. 4 (1994): 556.

the sudden influx of immigrants in need of work would “decrease the price labor could command in the workplace.”¹⁹ Additionally, industrialization made skill less of a barrier to entry into the workplace, meaning that workers could be more easily replaced at the will of their boss. The demand for immigration restriction became a common refrain of many labor activists, showing that some in the movement shared the broader nativist, anti-immigrant attitudes present in United States society during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰ When studying the relationship between the American labor movement and Jewish immigrants in particular, the historian Irwin Yellowitz came to the conclusion that the unions’ “resistance to organizing Jewish workers was only part of a similar attitude toward immigrants generally.”²¹

Some of the most well-known unions of the early twentieth century found themselves deeply divided on which workers to organize. As a federation of craft unions, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was already exclusionist by nature, but this tendency was only fortified by prejudices against prospective members who did not fit the ideal of a skilled, male, white, native-born worker.²² Generally, industrial unions were more inclusive than their trade union counterparts because their power lay in their “inclusion of a significant portion of the total workforce.”²³ The industrial union known as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was open to all workers, foreign-born and American alike, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, or skill level.²⁴ The AFL and IWW were locked in a rivalry with deep roots; Samuel Gompers, president

¹⁹ Pula, “Defining Public Perceptions,” 60.

²⁰ Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up,” 1001.

²¹ Irwin Yellowitz, “Jewish Immigrants and the American Labor Movement, 1900–1920,” *American Jewish History* 71, no. 2 (1981): 189.

²² Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up,” 1002.

²³ Yellowitz, “Jewish Immigrants,” 190.

²⁴ Philip S. Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917*, vol. 4, 10 vols., of *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 37.

of the AFL, claimed that supporters of the movement to establish what became the IWW “had tried to ‘divert, pervert, and disrupt the labor movement in this country.’”²⁵

Only a few years after its inception, the IWW found itself divided into two factions. The union was avowedly anti-capitalist and syndicalist; at its 1905 founding convention in Chicago, one of the union’s leaders, William Haywood, declared that their goal was to organize workers into a movement that would “have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism.”²⁶ Daniel De Leon was present at this convention, and his belief that a union could only liberate the working class if it was subordinate to a political organization went against direct-actionists who believed that this credo would turn the IWW “from a revolutionary organization to a mere political vehicle.”²⁷ De Leon himself was the leader of the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), a group that prioritized political action in the effort to liberate the working class. A.M. Simons, a member of the competing Socialist Party and supporter of economic action, accused De Leon of being “the strongest ally of Gompers & Co. in their war upon the IWW.”²⁸ Eventually, these disagreements made De Leon and his followers exiles of the original IWW. After being spurned in Chicago, they went on to form their own organization in Detroit and kept the name “Industrial Workers of the World.”²⁹

The Detroit IWW, which put political action through the SLP first above union organization, was the faction that greeted New Jersey’s silk workers in 1912. The workers may well have been familiar with the IWW name; the Chicago IWW-led textile strike in Lawrence,

²⁵ Tripp, *I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike*, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ Michael H. Ebner, “The Passaic Strike of 1912 and the Two I.W.W.s,” *Labor History* 11, no. 4 (1970): 453; Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 109.

²⁸ “The I.W.W. and DeLeonism,” *The Worker* (New York), Jun. 2, 1906.

²⁹ Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 109.

Massachusetts, received national attention and could have inspired those toiling for long hours and low wages at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill in Bayonne.

New Jersey

Meanwhile, New Jersey was experiencing much of the same booming industrial production that was present throughout the United States. In the year preceding the autumn of 1911 an average of 21,745 workers in New Jersey (out of 302,265 total across the state's industries) were employed in the broad silk and ribbon factories; this massive number was surpassed only by the machinery industry with 22,631 workers.³⁰

Migration played a significant role in making silk manufacturing one of the biggest industries in New Jersey. During the late-nineteenth century, the introduction of the power loom led the owners of European silk mills to mechanize production. Entrepreneurs began firing "skilled, expensive, and militant weavers" in favor of replacing them with "workers willing to accept employment at lower wages." As a result of the poverty that followed this sudden unemployment, many Italian, Swiss, French, and British skilled silk workers made the decision to immigrate to the United States, especially New Jersey. Patrizia Sione argues in her article, "Patterns of International Migrations: Italian Silk Workers in New Jersey, USA," that this influx of skilled European silk weavers and dyers made Paterson, a city located in northern New Jersey, the center of American silk production. The Switzerland-based Schwarzenbach-Huber company was part of the transatlantic expansion that took place during this time; the company "established an American branch of their dyeing and weaving business in West Hoboken, which is now part of Union City in northern Hudson County, in 1888."³¹

³⁰ Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey, "Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey," (Trenton, NJ, 1911), 42-43.

³¹ Sione, "Patterns of International Migrations," 563-566.

Schwarzenbach-Huber established its Bayonne silk mill in 1902, renting, and later buying, a factory located between 17th and 18th streets on Avenue E that was formerly owned by the Underwood Typewriter Company. The Schwarzenbach-Huber company originally planned to use only part of the building and rent out the remaining space, but Gladys Sinclair claimed so many local residents desired to work at the factory that “the company finally decided to use the entire building for itself and thus the established winding plant developed gradually into a thriving and complete weaving establishment.”³² By early 1912, about 700 workers were employed at the Bayonne Schwarzenbach-Huber factory.³³

Oddly enough, New Jersey had actually been experiencing a decline in labor activity prior to the outbreak of the silk industry strikes in 1912. The 1911 report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey reported “activity in the matter of organizing new labor unions in New Jersey has shown a very marked decline during the past five or six years,” adding that “year after year seems to show a steady decline in the number of unions organized.”³⁴

In spite of this reported downturn in unionism in the state, the Detroit faction of the IWW had been working to establish a presence in Paterson since 1910. The organization’s agents were working under the guidance of Rudolph Katz, who was the head of the city’s SLP.³⁵ Beginning in 1909, the Chicago-based main branch of the IWW had become active in several northeastern states. The rivalry existing between these two competing branches would later take center stage during the northern New Jersey silk mill strikes of 1912.³⁶

Bayonne

³² Gladys M. Sinclair, *Bayonne Old and New* (New York: Maranatha Publishers, 1940), 182.

³³ “Mill Owners Lock 30,000 Hands Out,” *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 26, 1912.

³⁴ Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey, “Thirty-Fourth Annual Report,” 287.

³⁵ Foner, *Industrial Workers of the World*, 354.

³⁶ Ebner, “The Two I.W.W.s,” 452.

Like many other cities in northern New Jersey, Bayonne's proximity to New York City made it an ideal location for industry. Situated on a peninsula in the southernmost part of Hudson County, Bayonne is bordered by three waterways: the Newark Bay on the west, the Kill Van Kull to the south, and the New York Bay on the east. Today, the city is about thirty minutes by car across the Hudson River from Manhattan and roughly forty minutes southeast of Paterson. Up until the late-nineteenth century, the economy in Bayonne was based on agriculture. However, between 1880 and 1905 the local population "nearly quadrupled and Bayonne overnight became an industrial city." By 1910, just a few years before the strikes took place, the city's population had soared past 55,000.³⁷ Oil refining was one of Bayonne's early industries. The Rockefeller-owned Standard Oil Company of New Jersey would become the most dominant company in the city. Though they could not crowd out all other industries, the abundant tax revenue brought to the city government by Standard Oil and other oil companies went, at least partially, into the salaries of city officials affiliated with prominent local families.³⁸

The 1912 Schwarzenbach-Huber Silk Mill Strike

The Strike's Beginnings

It was amidst this ongoing entanglement of city government with big business that the 1912 strike at Schwarzenbach-Huber's Bayonne factory took place. As previously mentioned, Schwarzenbach-Huber was a textile manufacturing company with European origins that had been present in New Jersey since 1888. Tensions had been high at the factories of New Jersey's silk industry for some time; in her book *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*, Anne Huber Tripp quotes a newspaper article from several years prior in which the author reports, "Strikes are

³⁷ John A. DeBrizzi, "Class Formation and the State": 115; 129.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

taking place [in the silk industry] every season.”³⁹ Followers of Daniel De Leon’s Detroit wing of the IWW spent the early months of 1912 settling into several North Jersey cities.⁴⁰ The *Jersey Journal* would report in March of that year that the Detroit IWW was planning a strike in the silk mills of Hudson County, and their professed goal was to “organize all of Hudson County and incorporate it in their movement.”⁴¹

The Detroit IWW’s strike of Hudson County silk workers began on March 13, 1912, when 200 female workers at the Schwarzenbach-Huber Company’s Bayonne mill walked out early in the day.⁴² According to the 1912 Annual Report of the New Jersey Bureau of Labor and Statistics of Industries, this first group of strikers consisted only of employees who worked and were paid by the day. Workers paid by the piece, who the report claims “were much the larger number,” evidently did not join the effort until later.⁴³ From the beginning, the immigrant backgrounds of the strikers were evident. Several workers at the first meeting of strikers held on the evening of March 13th gave speeches in Polish; a weaver at the mill who became one of the strike’s leaders, Charles Jablonowski, had been born in Poland.⁴⁴ Within the walk-out’s first twenty-four hours, law enforcement arrested “a number” of strikers and accused them of disorderly conduct. All the strikers arrested that day stated that they were either nineteen or twenty years old, highlighting the fact that the majority of the workers at the silk mill were young women in their teens or early twenties.⁴⁵

³⁹ Anne Huber Tripp, *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 36.

⁴⁰ Ebner, “The Two I.W.W.s,” 454.

⁴¹ “Mill Hands Threaten to Call Strike,” *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 12, 1912.

⁴² “Two Hundred Girls Strike in Bayonne,” *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 13, 1912.

⁴³ Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey, “Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey,” (Trenton, NJ, 1912), 239.

⁴⁴ “Striking Girls Arrested at Silk Company’s Plant,” *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 14, 1912; Chester Jablonowski, registration card for the draft, Jun. 5, 1917, from ancestry.com.

⁴⁵ “Striking Girls Arrested at Silk Company’s Plant,” *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 14, 1912.

The workers at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill wasted no time in formulating a list of resolutions. The principal demands put forth by the strikers were for a raise in pay and shorter hours. Bayonne's Mayor at the time, Matthew Cronin, attempted to intercede in the strike and claimed on March 15th that he had "laid [strikers'] claims for a shorter working day and an increase in pay to \$4 a week before the local officials of the company and they have promised me to take the matter up with their superiors in New York as soon as the latter can be reached tomorrow." The editors of the *Jersey Journal* interpreted this as a sign that the strike would soon be settled, but that was not the case. That same day, strikers held a meeting at Mydosh's International Hall and officially formed their own union of Bayonne silk workers to be affiliated with the Detroit IWW.⁴⁶

Confrontation outside the factory between officers and strikers continued, but it is hard to determine exactly how common police violence against strikers was. The events of March 15th give us an example of the differing testimonies relayed in newspapers. Four strikers were arrested that day by an officer who claimed that "the girls loitered about the factory building and refused to move on when told to do so."⁴⁷ An account of the incident published in the *New York Call*, a socialist daily newspaper based in New York City, tells a different story. The *Call* reported that police were liberal in their use of force, continuing that one striker was struck in the head by a club ("presumably a policeman's") and another was knocked down by a stone.⁴⁸ The striker who was hit in the head, Jennie Nagengast, was the daughter of German immigrants and would have been about nineteen years old at the time, once again illustrating the predominance of young women

⁴⁶ "Mayor Takes Hand in Girls' Strike; May Settle It To-Day," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 15, 1912.

⁴⁷ "Mayor's Attempt to Settle Girls' Strike is Temporarily Delayed," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 16, 1912. The newspaper clipping lists the arrested strikers as being between the ages of 16 and 20.

⁴⁸ "More Girls Join Silk Mill Strikers," *New York Call* (New York: New York), Mar. 16, 1912.

from immigrant families in the workforce of the Bayonne Schwarzenbach-Huber mill.⁴⁹ The same *Jersey Journal* article that featured the officer's explanation for arresting more strikers described this scene in which teenage workers struggled against armed policemen as a "crowd of excited femininity."⁵⁰

By March 22, despite some 150 strikers returning to work in the previous week, the strike had massively expanded. 480 workers were now on strike at the Bayonne Schwarzenbach-Huber mill, and 6,000 silk workers across Hudson County had walked out in solidarity.⁵¹ The following day, an edited list of demands was presented by a committee of strikers to the managers of the Bayonne Schwarzenbach-Huber mill and published in the newspaper:

One– 'the abolishment of the three and four loom system.

Two– 'A general increase of fifty per-cent on all the work done in the mill by the workers.

Three– 'Overtime to be paid at the rate of time and a half.

Four– 'All employes to be reinstated in their respective positions as held at the beginning of this dispute.

Five– 'All disputes to be taken up by the shop committee.

(Signed) 'Helen Price,

'Mary Wekwert,

'Chester Jablonowski,

'Stella Milkowsky.

⁴⁹ United States Census Bureau, "Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920– Population," Bayonne Ward 2, Hudson, New Jersey, roll T625_1041, page 13B, enumeration district 18, accessed on ancestry.com.

⁵⁰ "Mayor's Attempt to Settle Girls' Strike is Temporarily Delayed," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 16, 1912.

⁵¹ "Strike Guard is Increased," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 22, 1912; "6,000 Silk Workers Walk Out," *ibid.*

It is perhaps unsurprising that the mill's assistant superintendent, among others, responded to these demands with incredulity. In much the same fashion as the Herman brothers would a year later, he expressed fear that recognizing the strikers' union would be equivalent to putting the entire management of the mill in their hands.⁵²

Scabs and Scissorbills

As the strike went on, tensions rose between workers who remained out and those who had returned to work. Like the conflict between strikers and police, the true prevalence of this is difficult to quantify, but it was noteworthy enough to warrant coverage in the newspapers and the addition of more police guards outside the factory. A newspaper article published on March 27th stated that the Schwarzenbach-Huber Company had offered its striking Bayonne employees increased wages. The union vernacular of the day would have labeled workers ready to cross the picket lines as "scabs" (which is still in use today) or "scissorbills," a term used to describe workers unwilling to "align themselves with fellow members of the working class."⁵³ The workers who returned while the strike was still underway engendered "considerable resentment" among the remaining strikers, some of whom allegedly attacked them on their way home from work.⁵⁴

A few days later, Arthur Reimer, the strike's leader under the Detroit IWW, spoke at a meeting of Schwarzenbach-Huber workers and urged them not to engage in any violence, even discouraging getting into heated arguments that could potentially turn into fights. Another IWW representative in attendance at this meeting revealed that one of the struck silk companies in Hudson County had been attempting to recruit silk weavers from those already on strike in Lawrence. One striker came down from Massachusetts to answer an advertisement posted by this

⁵² "More Strikers Return to Work at Bayonne Silk Plant," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 25, 1912

⁵³ Tom Dalzell, *Damn the Man!: Slang of the Oppressed in America* (New York: Dover Publications, 2010), 139.

⁵⁴ "Striking Girls Are Turbulent," *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 27, 1912; "Mad Riot in Mill as Strike Begins," *New York Times* (New York: New York), Mar. 27, 1912.

company before realizing that he would be used as a strikebreaker, upon which he remarked that “if he wanted to scab it there was plenty of chance in Lawrence.”⁵⁵

Burning Out

The Bayonne Schwarzenbach-Huber strike continued for several weeks in much the same way as it had begun, but the ever-present trickle of employees returning to the factory gradually became more of a problem. Broken solidarity can be fatal to any strike, and on April 4th one of the mill’s superintendents shared that roughly 500 former strikers had returned to work.⁵⁶ Though organizers with the Detroit IWW were adamant that they would continue the strike and fight for union recognition, the remaining strikers were more inclined than ever to accept the concessions offered by their employers.⁵⁷ The financial strain of nearly a month spent without their normal pay likely influenced those who decided to return. Workers from the Bayonne factory were among those who went to New York City with a group of striking silk mill employees to collect donations of food and money for strikers.⁵⁸

On the evening of April 12, a committee of representatives chosen by the strikers met with the Schwarzenbach-Huber Company’s Bayonne managers to decide on the terms of the strike’s settlement. The mill managers initially resisted the inclusion of weaver Chester Jablonowski on the committee, but the strikers threatened to walk out of negotiations if he was not allowed to stay, and so Jablonowski remained. The concessions that the managers put forward were not very different from what they had been over the preceding few weeks. The *Jersey Journal* reported in their article on the meeting that raises were applied to both the piecework schedules and time-

⁵⁵ “Strikers Told to be Orderly,” *Jersey Journal*, Mar. 29, 1912.

⁵⁶ “More Strikers Back at Work,” *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 4, 1912.

⁵⁷ “Police, the Only Sign of Strike,” *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 9, 1912.

⁵⁸ “Passaic Strikers Losing,” *New York Times*, Apr. 11, 1912.

based schedules across multiple departments of the factory.⁵⁹ After about four hours of arguments, the committee agreed to return to work the following Monday on the conditions offered. The Schwarzenbach-Huber company refused to recognize the IWW-affiliated union that the workers had formed.⁶⁰ The strikers on the committee seemingly voiced no protest against this, but it meant that the workers at the factory would come out of the strike without a union to protect the gains they had just won.

By that Monday, 1,089 of the Schwarzenbach-Huber Company's 1,100 employees across Hudson County had returned to work, leading the newspaper to declare that the silk strikes were "practically ended."⁶¹ During another conference between managers and the strike committee on April 19th, company officials signed an agreement that they would uphold the newly raised wage schedules at the strikers' insistence. By the next day, "the entire force of employe[e]s with a few exceptions" was back at the Bayonne silk mill.⁶²

"A Splendid Fight"

In a newspaper clipping from 1915 describing conditions in the hat trade, the author stated that many union organizers found it more difficult to organize women than men, before concluding, "One thing is certain, when women do go out on strike they put up a splendid fight."⁶³ Though they did not win the union recognition that had become such a prominent part of the strike, it should still be appreciated that the workers of the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill were able to hold

⁵⁹ Under the piecework schedule, workers were paid by the piece instead of by the day or hour. The *Jersey Journal* article outlines the specific increases in pay allotted to the weaving, twisting, and winding departments. Seniority played a role in who got which raises: workers who had been with the company for less than two years received a smaller increase than those who had been employed for over two years.

⁶⁰ "Settle Silk Strike, Shut Out Union," *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 13, 1912.

⁶¹ "Silk Strike Ends; Union Shut Out," *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 15, 1912.

⁶² "Silk Strike Ended," *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 20, 1912.

⁶³ "Bad Conditions in Hat Trade," newspaper clipping, Jul. 26, 1915, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 26, folder 1, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY. https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspacer_ref99/.

out for as long as they did. The tenacity that sprung forth from the ranks of strikers proved formidable in the face of unfavorable odds. In one eventful afternoon, the young women involved in the strike had the stamina to both speak directly to reporters about their taxing working conditions (“If any of us sit down for a minute after we are that tired standing, we are asked if we think we are in a dining room.”) and publicly heckle the mayor (“Gee, Mat, but you’ve got us!”).⁶⁴ Accordingly, this strike warrants a view in light of its victories as opposed to being remembered solely for its failures.

The 1913 Herman Bros. Factory Strike

Background and the Start of the Strike

At the time of the 1913 strike at the factory he co-owned with his brothers, Jacob Herman had been in business in Bayonne since about 1902.⁶⁵ The Herman brothers were Romanian Jewish immigrants who arrived in New York during the last 15 years of the nineteenth century. Before moving to Bayonne, several members of the Herman family settled in Manhattan’s Lower East Side.⁶⁶ It was in Manhattan that they became involved in the cap manufacturing industry, operating a factory at 542 West Broadway as early as 1901.⁶⁷ According to Rose Schneiderman, it was the threat of their workers unionizing that drove the Herman Bros. to move their business across the river. Despite their best efforts, however, an early strike that was ultimately unsuccessful took

⁶⁴ “Mayor’s Attempt to Settle Girls’ Strike is Temporarily Delayed,” *Jersey Journal*, Apr. 15, 1912.

⁶⁵ “Herman Brothers Say More Violence Will Be Met With Resistance,” *Bayonne Review* (Bayonne: New Jersey), Apr. 18, 1913; “Jacob Herman, Long Ill, Dies,” *Bayonne Times* (Bayonne: New Jersey), Aug. 19, 1940.

⁶⁶ United States Census Bureau, “Twelfth Census of the United States: Schedule No. 1.-- Population,” Manhattan, New York, New York, roll 1099, page 30, enumeration district 0383, accessed on ancestry.com; 1905 New York State Population Schedules, Manhattan, New York, election district 17, block A, assembly district 6, accessed on ancestry.com.

⁶⁷ *The Trow (formerly Wilson’s) Copartnership and Corporation Directory of New York City*, (New York City: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Co., 1901), p. 215.

place at the Bayonne factory in 1904 after their workers attempted to join the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers.⁶⁸

When the New York cap trade began in the mid-nineteenth century, it was a homework industry: women took their work home from manufacturers' warehouses, and manufacturers only employed cutters in their factories.⁶⁹ However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the industry was very different. Cap manufacturing had long since moved into factories, and the conditions that workers toiled in were appalling. In his history of the United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers' Union, Donald B. Robinson wrote that "Most of the shops were tiny, located in airless, lightless cellars or in windowless lofts where the sun never came. The hours there were twelve, fourteen or more a day, the wages minute." This state of affairs was present across the garment industry, but Robinson argues that the cap industry fit "especially well into the sweatshop pattern of homework" because caps were almost entirely handmade.⁷⁰

The Lower East Side's immigrant residents, with their unjust workplaces undoubtedly in mind, made the neighborhood a hub of socialist organization. For some organizers, their conception of the class struggle was not formed in the United States. Many eastern European Jewish immigrants to New York were intellectuals and scholars in exile that had been profoundly influenced by anti-tsarists back home. As Robinson succinctly put it, "The men who once had argued Talmudic fine points now dissected Karl Marx."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Schneiderman and Goldthwaite, *All for One*, 52. Schneiderman does not name the Herman Bros. specifically, but the timing of the strike and the details that she does include (a small factory based in Bayonne that had recently moved from New York City) line up exactly with their operations. Upon checking the 1904 Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey, it states that there was, in fact, a strike at the Herman Bros. factory early in 1904 concerning 20 men and 6 women workers.

⁶⁹ Bernard Weinstein and Maurice Wolfthal, *The Jewish Unions in America: Pages of History and Memories* (Open Book Publishers, 2018), 116.

⁷⁰ Donald B. Robinson, *Spotlight on a Union: The Story of the United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union* (New York: The Dial Press, 1948), 102-103.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

The United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers of North America was born of this environment. Officially organized in New York City in 1901, the union affiliated itself with the AFL and was considered to be one of the United Hebrew Trades' (UHT) more forceful members, with Melech Epstein writing that they had a "long record of aggressive militancy."⁷² In 1907, an economic panic led to factory closures, worsened working conditions, and a rise in anti-union sentiment. The United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers weathered this storm and emerged in late 1908 having proved that they were a union capable of fighting for their members in the face of financial hardship.⁷³

Though news of it would not first appear in the papers until March, the 1913 strike at the Herman Bros. factory was set in motion two months earlier. On January 22, 1913, the question of whether to organize the workers at the Bayonne hat factory was first put before the joint executive board of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers during its weekly meeting at their headquarters on the Lower East Side.⁷⁴ The board decided to leave it up to the local that had presented the proposal, and by the next week's meeting the shop was organized. One of the organizers at the meeting reported that the Herman brothers had been willing to recognize the union.⁷⁵

In the ensuing several weeks, the Hermans changed their minds. One can only speculate as to why, but there are a few possibilities. Perhaps the brothers discovered that the union had "strong

⁷² Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.: An Industrial, Political, and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement, 1914-1952* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1953), 178; U.S. Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of American Trade-Unions* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), 126; Green, *World of the Worker*, 29.

⁷³ Robinson, *Spotlight on a Union*, 118-119.

⁷⁴ Book of National Executive Board minutes, mixed materials, pgs. 104-105, 1911-1913, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 19, folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspace_ref99/.

⁷⁵ Book of National Executive Board minutes, mixed materials, pg. 105, 1911-1913, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 19, folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspace_ref99/.

socialist sympathies” and feared the confidence that radicalism could give their employees.⁷⁶ Or, maybe they resented having to surrender any amount of control to their workers’ collective bargaining power. Regardless, in late March the brothers hired several non-union workmen. Jacob Herman refused to answer any questions his employees had about the development, telling them that “he was going to run his factory or it would not be run at all.” When the workers protested, Herman gave them an ultimatum to get to work or get out. They all walked out in response, and the strike began.⁷⁷

In contrast to the strike at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill, which received near-daily coverage in the *Jersey Journal*, the extant newspaper coverage of the Herman Bros. strike skews toward being feast or famine. Though the strike had already been underway for weeks, the first substantial newspaper account of it was published on April 17 in the *Bayonne Evening Review*. This article gives readers some context on the circumstances that led to the strike, but the meat of it describes what they refer to as a “riot at the cap factory.” Jacob Herman had hired fifteen strikebreakers in the previous two weeks and was housing them in the factory itself. Several of these strikebreakers were driven to Herman’s home on the evening of April 16 to take baths, but a striker noticed them leaving and a crowd of “about 500 strikers, sympathizers, and friends” had assembled outside the factory by the time of their return. The author claims that strikers threw rocks and bricks at the strikebreakers while chanting “Scab! Scab! Kill the scab!” In contrast to the vivid language afforded the strikers, the police are said to have merely “used their clubs of the rioters.” One of the Herman brothers told a reporter on the scene that they would rather close down

⁷⁶ Yellowitz, “Jewish Immigrants,” 189.

⁷⁷ “Bright Bayonettes,” *The Bayonne Herald and Greenville Register*, Mar. 29, 1913; “Herman Brothers Say More Violence Will Be Met With Resistance,” *Bayonne Review*, Apr. 18, 1913; Book of National Executive Board minutes, mixed materials, pg. 117, 1911-1913, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 19, folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY. https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspaces_ref99/.

the factory than recognize their workers' union.⁷⁸ This appears to be when Jacob Herman decided to enlist his daughters as strikebreakers; they were brought on to replace "the girls who had gone out," indicating that both men and women worked in the factory.⁷⁹

While it is certainly possible that the author of this article embellished his account, what he depicts is characteristic of the more militant, direct action taken by the Herman Bros. strikers throughout the walkout; one example of this would come when a striker named Harry Goldstein "upset a wagon" carrying ice to strike breakers and "smashed [its] contents."⁸⁰ At Bayonne's May Day parade, a guest speaking at the event encouraged "the capmakers," presumably the Herman Bros. workers, to continue the fight for recognition of their union. Only a week later, the Herman Bros. strikers would see the most consequential few days of the strike yet.

A Family Affair

On May 7, Dora Herman, a daughter of Jacob Herman employed as a strikebreaker, got into a fight with three young women who were among the strikers. Dora blamed the strikers for starting the fight by subjecting her to "insulting remarks" while the strikers accused Dora of instigating it when she addressed them in a "sarcastic manner." Either way, the fight became ugly as Dora and the strikers pulled each other's hair and clawed at each other's faces before it ended when Louis Herman came to his sister's rescue. At this point it is worth mentioning that Dora was just 18 years old at the time of the strike; in all likelihood, the strikers she fought were teenagers as well. Louis was older, however, and the scrappy violence of the evening did not stop with him. Mere hours after breaking up the fight involving his sister, Louis passed Harry Goldstein, one of the leading strikers, and slashed him across the face with an "instrument [pulled] from his pocket."

⁷⁸ "Riot at Cap Factory Last Night; Police Were Called to Scene," *Bayonne Review*, Apr. 17, 1913.

⁷⁹ "Cap Makers Daughters Act as Strikebreakers," *Newark Evening Star* (Newark: New Jersey), Apr. 18, 1913.

⁸⁰ "Striker Fined \$5," *Bayonne Review*, May 26, 1913.

The newspaper reported that, according to the strikers, Jacob Herman had called on his son to act as something of a factory bodyguard and that Louis had threatened strikers with violence on multiple occasions.⁸¹

The vigilante force utilized by allies of the Herman brothers continued on May 9. That afternoon, one of the strikebreakers already inside the factory dropped a note written in Yiddish down to the strikers outside. In the letter he offered to join the strikers' ranks in exchange for \$25, adding that his fellow scabs were also available to be bribed and that more strikebreakers would be arriving that evening. The strikers rejected his offer and prepared a picket line that could physically prevent the new hires from entering. Not long after the warning was relayed, two "strange men" arrived at the factory. The picketers tried to ask them why they wanted to enter the building, but the men did not respond and quickly "struck left and right at the strikers." It became clear that these men were two of the new strikebreakers, and as they walked through the entrance to the factory the strikers trailed behind. A member of the Herman Bros. firm claimed that the strikers attempted to break down the doors to the building with iron bars and that they smashed the windows on their way in.

Then, the situation rapidly escalated. Several shots were fired from inside the building by strikebreakers, and Anna Jacobs, one of the strikers that had followed the group into the factory, was shot through the right hand. The strikers rushed Jacobs to a doctor who could treat her injury.⁸² A reporter's description of this havoc received front-page coverage and a headline in the next evening's edition of the *Bayonne Review*. Only two days later, however, the newspaper published

⁸¹ "Strikers and Cap Factory Owner's Daughter Pull Hair," *Bayonne Review*, May 08, 1913; United States Census Bureau, "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population," Bayonne Ward 2, Hudson, New Jersey, roll T625_1041, page 7B, enumeration district 16, accessed on ancestry.com; Dora's brother was also known as Irving Herman or Irving L. Herman because Louis appears to have been his middle name.

⁸² "Arrival of Additional Strike Breakers Cause of Another Outbreak," *Bayonne Review*, May 10, 1913; "Try to Raid Factory," *New York Times*, May 10, 1913.

a small editorial in which they condemned the cap factory strikers for resorting to violence and scolded them for destroying property. The hired strikebreakers who beat picketers and shot Anna Jacobs were subjected to no similar rebuke.⁸³

The events of the past several days had swift legal ramifications. On May 12, multiple cases of disorderly conduct related to the strike at the Herman Bros. factory were brought before Recorder Hugh H. Mara. Mara ultimately dismissed these cases on the basis of a lack of evidence, but their details are illuminating. The first was leveled against Irving Herman by a police officer who had arrived on the scene shortly after Herman slashed Harry Goldstein. The officer accused Herman of carrying a concealed weapon (said to be a billy club) and taking it upon himself to “usurp the powers of the police.”

Somewhat predictably, the next case was brought forth by Dora Herman against several strikers who she identified as the individuals involved in the fight of May 7. The only available witness, a schoolteacher who “happened to be in the vicinity at the time,” testified that she did not see any hair pulling. Although the witness did see “somebody pulling something and Miss Herman [...] pulling them back,” she was not sure that the defendants were the actual guilty parties.

The penultimate case of the day was brought by Irving Herman against Rudolf Lebovit, an active member of the strike. In what was surely a surprising twist to those unaware, Lebovit was Herman’s own uncle; he was married to Sarah Lebovit, Jacob Herman’s sister.⁸⁴ Irving Herman accused his uncle of threatening him with violence and breaking a factory window. With no evidence to support Herman’s claims, Recorder Mara “dismissed [Lebovit] with a reprimand.”

⁸³ “Violence of Strikers,” *Bayonne Review*, May 12, 1913.

⁸⁴ Obituary of Mrs. Rudolph Lebovit, *Bayonne Times*, Apr. 8, 1943; Rudolf Lebovit’s name is written several different ways across the newspaper articles and census records that I have seen. For consistency’s sake, I will be writing it as “Rudolf Lebovit,” which was the way he signed it in a letter he sent to the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers union during the strike. As far as I have seen, the Herman sisters appear in no accounts of the strike, but there were at least three of them according to Sarah’s obituary.

Dora Herman then charged Harry Goldstein with trying to hit her, but the case also lacked evidence and was dismissed.⁸⁵

Aside from the accounts that appear pertaining to the Hermans' daughters, women are seldom mentioned in newspaper accounts of the Herman Bros. strike. In spite of this, it is indisputable that women workers were among the ranks of strikers. Rose Schneiderman, who had experience as a capmaker, wrote in her 1967 autobiography *All for One* that work in men's cap factories was divided by gender, explaining, "the men did the cutting of the caps as well as the sewing, while women employees made the cap linings."⁸⁶ In fact, a fellow female worker at the cap factory named Bessie Braut was the person who first introduced Schneiderman to the possibility of unionization. Schneiderman recollected that Braut argued "it would be a good thing for the lining-makers to join a union along with the trimmers, who were all women," even adding that herself and her coworkers "had had no idea that there was a union in our industry and that women could join it."⁸⁷ The union in question was the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers, where Schneiderman went on to become the first female member of its General Executive Board.⁸⁸

Though the altercations that took place in early May were not the last to occur over the course of the walkout, they illustrate the elements of personal resentment and contempt that distinguish the Herman Bros. strike from the one at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill a year prior. As the strike continued without an end in sight, the cap factory strikers struggled to make ends meet just as those at the silk mill did. A committee of three strikers appeared before the general executive board of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers' Union on May 21 to request assistance with rent for several strikers that were in need. Their union agreed to provide the funds, keeping

⁸⁵ "Mara Says Trouble at Herman Factory Must Stop At Once," *Bayonne Review*, May 12, 1913.

⁸⁶ Schneiderman and Goldthwaite, *All for One*, 43.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

the strike alive in the process.⁸⁹ When, a few weeks later, Local #3 of the union refused to cover their share of the expenses unless they received weekly reports of the strike's conditions, two organizers were chosen for the task of bringing them information.⁹⁰

Heels Digging In

The month of June proved relatively quiet for the strike, at least as far as newspaper reports were concerned, but Bayonne's Mayor Cronin was becoming exasperated with the Herman Bros.' unwillingness to cooperate. Since union recognition was the strikers' only demand, it was very clear what the owners needed to do in order to end the strike. According to the *Bayonne Review*, Cronin himself told Meyer Herman that he felt "the strikers have been fair in their demands and the firm extremely unfair." The author of this article corroborated Cronin's claim, writing that "The great strength of the [Herman Bros.] firm has been in its leaning on the police department of the city, and the city has borne the burden of the strike." Cronin then told Meyer Herman that if the strike was not immediately settled, the police protection enjoyed by the Hermans would be withdrawn.⁹¹

As a brief aside, modern readers may be puzzled by the Herman brothers' persistent refusal to recognize their employees' union. The factory was small: in 1906 it had 35 workers and by 1915 there were ten less; why would the Hermans have been so willing to throw away their business just to avoid acknowledging their employees' autonomy?⁹² Though we cannot ask the bosses

⁸⁹ Book of National Executive Board minutes, mixed materials, pg. 124, 1911-1913, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 19, folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspace_ref99/.

⁹⁰ Book of National Executive Board minutes, mixed materials, pg. 130, 1911-1913, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 19, folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspace_ref99/.

⁹¹ "Efforts to Settle Herman Cap Factory Strike Futile," *Bayonne Review*, Jun. 12, 1913.

⁹² Sinclair, *Bayonne Old and New*, 184; 190.

themselves, pride was likely a key factor. Bernard Weinstein explained that inflexible factory owners were a common presence in his day:

Every manufacturer thinks that the business he runs is his own, and that no one has the right to interfere and tell him how to conduct it. [...] Naturally the capitalist cannot stand it when the unions get involved in their affairs. They simply cannot abide by it when workers tell them how to manage a private business.⁹³

The Beginning of the End

July saw another eruption of violence and shifts in the circumstances of the strike. On the evening of July 1, a crowd of strikers and sympathizers followed the strikebreakers from the factory to Meyer Herman's home on 31st Street. The fight began when one of the strikebreakers tried to kick Morris Bressler, a strike sympathizer, and he responded by pulling the strikebreakers' foot. An argument ensued between Benjamin Kirschner, a striker, and Joseph Bressler, another sympathizer, during which the crowd "urged the men on to fight." The crowd was then "dispersed with night sticks by the police," and the four men involved in the action were arrested.

Only nine days into the month, Mayor Cronin had utterly run out of patience. The police escorts given to the strikebreakers were rescinded and only one officer was kept on duty to "prevent damage to the factory building." Cronin appeared consistently flummoxed by the Hermans' stubbornness and was quoted saying that the strikers "are and always have been willing to meet their employers half way. But all their efforts have always been rebuffed."⁹⁴

On July 16, an organizer of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers reported to the general executive board that in the previous week Jacob Herman responded well to the police being

⁹³ Weinstein and Wolfthal, *Jewish Unions in America*, 85.

⁹⁴ "Police Withdrawn from Cap Factory," *Bayonne Review*, Jul. 9, 1913.

withdrawn and that his lawyer had actually begun to negotiate a strike settlement. But, a few days into the negotiations, sympathizers got into a fight with strikebreakers outside the factory “against the protests of the strikers.” Twelve officers were assigned to guard the factory, reestablishing a police presence and leading Herman to drop the negotiations. The strikers seemed to have had mixed feelings about the outlook of the strike at this time. A committee of five strikers (one of whom was Rudolf Lebovit) appeared before their union’s general executive board on July 23 to speak on the strike. They considered the strike’s conditions to be “very good” because all thirteen of the strikebreakers employed by Jacob Herman were either “learners or professional New York gangsters.” The committee added, however, that they did not expect to win the strike “on account of the stubbornness of Herman not to have a union shop, who, they believe, would rather lose his entire business [...] than to give in.” They also stated that the strike benefit would need to be raised if the effort was to continue because the funds allocated to them at the time were not enough to continue living on.⁹⁵

The last mention of the Herman Bros. strike to appear in the local newspapers as it happened came on August 26, 1913 in the form of a small notice that the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers’ union had brought a petition to the city council protesting “the protection given to the manufacturers at Herman Bros. factory during the recent strike.”⁹⁶ After so many months of struggle between strikers, their sympathizers, strikebreakers, and the Herman brothers themselves, there was no announcement of the strike’s end published in the local newspapers. In spite of this,

⁹⁵ Book of National Executive Board minutes, mixed materials, pgs. 138-139, 1911-1913, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, TAM 054, box 19, folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspace_ref99/.

⁹⁶ “Official Proceedings of the City Council,” *Bayonne Review*, Aug. 26, 1913.

an estimate can be made that the strike ended in September after 29 weeks thanks to information from Rudolf Lebovit himself.

Lebovit v. General Executive Board

Tucked amongst ephemera and books of meeting minutes in the special collections of NYU's Tamiment Library, a single letter written by Lebovit to the General Executive Board of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers Union survives. In this letter, written in Yiddish⁹⁷ and dated October 4, 1913, Lebovit laid bare his claim that the union owed him money for purchases he made on their behalf over the course of the strike. Lebovit stated that he received a total of \$294.00 "throughout the 29 weeks that the strike was going on." Estimating from this total that he received roughly ten dollars a week, Lebovit then wrote "I ask you: is it possible for a family man to make a living with \$10.00 a week for 29 weeks[?]"⁹⁸

The extent to which this letter conveys Lebovit's frustration with the outcome of the strike is truly remarkable; he added that "afterwards when we gave up the strike I was going around looking for a job for 3 weeks and could not find any work—meaning a total of 32 weeks, so how do I have the means to swallow this money owed to me[?]"⁹⁹ Considering that the letter was dated to the first week of October, it can be assumed that the strike ended in early September, soon after the final newspaper coverage appeared. Underneath his signature, Lebovit identified himself as the "Former Chairman of the [Bayonne] strike." It should be kept in mind that Lebovit was Jacob and Meyer Herman's brother-in-law, underscoring the intensely personal nature of the Herman

⁹⁷ A rabbi who wishes to remain anonymous was kind enough to translate Lebovit's letter into English for my benefit.

⁹⁸ Lebovit to the General Executive Board of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers Union, translated by Anonymous, October 4, 1913, Series III, United Hatters, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, https://findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_054/contents/aspacer_ref99/.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Bros. strike.¹⁰⁰ However, the 1913 strike would not be the end of the workers' battle for union recognition at the Herman Bros. factory.

The Strikes' Sequels

The owners of the Herman Bros. factory and the Schwarzenbach-Huber mills saw two more strikes at their businesses in 1916 and 1917. Like the strikes in 1912 and 1913, they took place within a year of one another. Both were much shorter than their predecessors and lasted less than two weeks before they were settled. The success of the strike at the Herman Bros. factory was a profound change in circumstance, but the outcome at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill was somewhat more mixed.

1916

In September 1916, members of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers of North America returned to Bayonne with a plan to finally win union recognition for the workers at the Herman Bros. cap factory.¹⁰¹ On the 13th of that month, about fourteen young women employed at the factory went on strike, demanding recognition of their union and shorter hours. The newspaper reported that they were working "fifty-seven hours a week and all day on Sunday" and that they wanted "half a day off on Sunday and fifty hours a week."¹⁰² The next day, the number of strikers rose to thirty-five when the factory's male workers joined the walkout.¹⁰³

The only altercation of note that took place during the strike happened on the 16th when the female strikers saw Daniel Cady, a former police inspector who was now the chief, passing by

¹⁰⁰ Though there were two other Herman brothers (named Abraham and Morris, respectively), Jacob and Meyer appear to have been the ones most involved with the factory; at the very least, they are the ones mentioned in the newspaper accounts of the strike.

¹⁰¹ "New Yorkers Try to Call Local Capmakers' Strike," *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Sep. 12, 1916.

¹⁰² "Fourteen Girls on Strike for Half Day on Sunday," *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Sep. 13, 1916.

¹⁰³ "Men Join the Girl Strikers at Herman Cap Factory," *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Sep. 14, 1916.

them in a trolley car. The strikers reportedly remembered Cady from the strike three years prior because he “had made himself unpopular with them when he had some of them arrested.” They laughed at him from afar, but when Rose Rifkin, an 18-year-old striker, shouted “Scab!” in his direction across the street, he leapt from the trolley car and ran after Rifkin as the others scattered into nearby alleys. After chasing her for two blocks, Cady arrested Rifkin on a charge of disorderly conduct, for which she was “severely reprimanded” at the Recorder’s court.¹⁰⁴

In what surely felt miraculous compared to its predecessor, this strike ended with victory for the strikers on the evening of September 22 after four days of arbitration. Hyman Lazarus, a labor lawyer and former Recorder, was chosen to act as a mediator by both the Herman Bros. and the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers. Under the terms of their settlement, working hours were shortened and the Herman Bros. factory would be “completely unionized.” The author of the newspaper article announcing the strike’s end reminded readers that the last strike “lasted for thirty-three weeks and was lost by the union.”¹⁰⁵ Max Zaritsky, an organizer that had been involved in the 1913 strike with the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers of North America, went as far as to send a letter to the editor of the *Bayonne Times* in which he expressed his gratitude to Lazarus and credited him with preventing what could have been a much longer, drawn-out strike.¹⁰⁶

1917

The strike in 1917 at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill lasted less than a week, but it involved a very large workforce. Following discontent over a pay increase proposed by the company, 900 employees walked out of the Bayonne Schwarzenbach-Huber factory on March 8, 1917. These

¹⁰⁴ “Arrested As She Calls Dan Cady a ‘Scab,’” *Bayonne Review*, Sep. 16, 1916.

¹⁰⁵ “Herman Bros. Men Elated at Strike Settlement,” *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Sep. 23, 1916; “Judge Lazarus As a Strike Mediator,” *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Sep. 30, 1916.

¹⁰⁶ “Letters to the Editor,” *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Oct. 06, 1916; Untitled (on page 4), *The Evening Times and Bayonne Daily Times*, Oct. 07, 1916.

employees, “mostly girls” according to the newspaper, refused to return to work unless they were given an increase in pay greater than what had already been offered. The same newspaper clipping reported that part of the dissatisfaction arose from the nature of the workers’ wage scale; they were paid by the amount of work completed, but also by its quality. The strikers wanted to be paid the same amount for all classes of goods, in addition to an overall raise.¹⁰⁷

The strike saw its most direct confrontation between strikers and police on the same day that it began. When some “operatives” were escorted out of the mill by police at the end of the workday, a crowd of strikers outside the building pelted them with snowballs and stones. Daniel Cady, evidently lacking friends among Bayonne’s young women workers, was struck directly in the eye by one of the snowballs, with the *Bayonne Review* claiming that it “nearly carried Dan’s head off.” Cady, who had chased a teenager two blocks to arrest her for name-calling only six months prior, was praised in the newspaper for “how even tempered he can be with the ladies.” Police arrested five strikers, three of whom were women between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two, for their role in the icy onslaught.¹⁰⁸

Like the Herman Bros. strike of the previous year, the 1917 Schwarzenbach-Huber strike was settled with the help of an outside mediator. The day after the strike began, a committee of five strikers sought out Bayonne’s Director of Public Safety, Henry Wilson, and asked him to speak to their bosses on their behalf “so as to get them the raise in wages they ask.”¹⁰⁹ Wilson agreed to consider it, and on March 12 he spoke to the mill’s general manager. Through the mill’s general managers, Wilson was able to convince the company officials to grant the strikers “an increase of five per cent in their wages and one cent per yard for all the goods they turn out.” While

¹⁰⁷ “900 Girls at Silk Mill Quit Want Big Raise,” *Bayonne Review*, Mar. 08, 1917.

¹⁰⁸ “Strikers Ask Help of Wilson,” *Bayonne Review*, Mar. 9, 1917; “Who’s What and Why,” *Bayonne Review*, Mar. 10, 1917; “Girl Strikers Snowball Police,” *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1917.

¹⁰⁹ “Strikers Ask Help of Wilson,” *Bayonne Review*, Mar. 9, 1917

this was less than the ten percent wage increase favored by the strikers, it was enough for them to agree to the offer and return to work the following morning.¹¹⁰ The swift endings of both strikes in 1916 and 1917 may raise questions as to why the bosses seemed so eager to reach settlements compared to their stubbornness in years past. By this point, Bayonne had seen two strikes at its Standard Oil refineries: one in 1915 and another in 1916. The strikes were massive (on one morning during the second walkout a crowd of 1,200 workers blocked the refinery's entrance) and received far more media coverage than the ones discussed, but they were also deadlier: over ten strikers and bystanders alike were killed.¹¹¹ With these recent events fresh in their minds, the owners of the Schwarzenbach-Huber and Herman Bros. factories may have felt more inclined to avoid a strike of a similar scale.

Conclusion

The concrete legacy left behind by these strikes is difficult to discern. Of all the Bayonne residents I spoke about them with, only a few people knew of the factories involved, let alone the strikes themselves. Learning details about the strikes like their start and end dates, the names of the strikers, and the unions involved is certainly valuable in its own right, but what is most impactful in studying these events is their ability to place Bayonne in the larger history of America in the early twentieth century.

Both factories employed immigrants who came to the United States during a time that is now closely associated with sepia-toned images of ships full of weary families entering New York Harbor on their way to Ellis Island. Employers faced with abundant prospective hires in need of

¹¹⁰ "Wilson as Mediator Ends Strike," *Bayonne Review*, Mar. 13, 1917.

¹¹¹ George Dorsey, "The Bayonne Refinery Strikes of 1915-1916," *Polish American Studies* 33, no. 2 (1976): 24; 26; 29.

work “preferred a labor force divided by race and national origins.”¹¹² The diverse backgrounds of the strikers at the Schwarzenbach-Huber factory provide an example of this phenomenon. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, Charles Jablonowski was a Polish immigrant and Jennie Nagengast was born in New Jersey to German parents. Sarah O’Donnell and Annie Harmet, two other workers involved in the silk strike, were both born in New Jersey to immigrant families; O’Donnell’s parents were Irish while Harmet’s were Hungarian.¹¹³ Looking at the struggles that immigrants and their children endured once they settled in the United States humanizes them and shows continuity in their experiences across time.

The stories of women involved in the strikes highlight the increased presence of women in the workplace and their courage in the face of pressure from bosses and police officers. Many daughters of immigrants in the early twentieth century United States, such as O’Donnell and Harmet, worked to support their families. “Factory girls,” as they came to be known, constituted “the largest part of the clothing-industry proletariat” and were paid about half as much as their male counterparts.¹¹⁴ The number of women employed in industrial jobs forced organizations like the AFL and IWW to recruit women and fit them into their conception of the labor movement.¹¹⁵

¹¹² James R. Barrett and David Roediger. “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (1997): 16.

¹¹³ O’Donnell is listed as a member of the strikers’ committee in the article “Settle Silk Strike, Shut Out Union,” published in the Apr. 13, 1912, issue of the *Jersey Journal*. She appears in the following federal census record: United States Census Bureau, “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910– Population,” Bayonne Ward 1, Hudson County, New Jersey, roll T624_886, page 10A, enumeration district 0007, accessed on ancestry.com; Harmet is referenced in the article “Blame North Hudson Strike Leaders for Labor Trouble,” published in the Mar. 29, 1912 issue of the *Jersey Journal*. She appears in the following state census record: 1915 New Jersey State Census, Hudson County, Bayonne Ward 5, page 29A, reference number L-13, film number 28, accessed on ancestry.com; Both census records that I have cited list Harmet and O’Donnell as workers at a silk mill.

¹¹⁴ Green, *World of the Worker*, 24.

¹¹⁵ Ann Schofield, “Rebel Girls and Union Maids: The Woman Question in the Journals of the AFL and IWW, 1905-1920,” *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1983): 336; 343.

Lastly, the different unions involved in the strikes, namely the IWW and the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers of North America, show the labor movement's spread throughout the United States and its various approaches to organizing. Strikes proliferated across the United States in the 1910s. The *New York Call*, for example, was still covering the Lawrence textile workers' strike as it began to report on the silk strikes in Hudson County. Unions even defied expectations in some cases; the strikers at the trade-union organized Herman Bros. factory arguably displayed more militancy than those affiliated with industrial-unionists at the Schwarzenbach-Huber mill. The few years following the initial Herman Bros. strike would prove fruitful for the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers as they "achieved uniform work prices, a wage boost, and a cut in hours from fifty to forty-nine a week."¹¹⁶

It is my hope that the history of these strikes will provide readers with a fuller, more vibrant picture of Bayonne's industrial past, and a new lens through which to view its future.

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¹¹⁶ Robinson, *Spotlight on a Union*, 128.