

The Games We Play: The Rise and Fall of Ideal Toy Corporation in Newark's Ironbound District

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Abstract: The 1970s were an era of great change for Newark—its industrial economy fled overseas in search of cheap labor, leaving thousands unemployed in their wake as the city reeled from the effects of the Newark Rebellion. The Ironbound neighborhood was hit hardest, losing the Ballantine Brewery and other major employers in just a few short years. The Ideal Toy Corporation, which failed to expand operations in Queens, promised to bring opportunity and renewal to Newark during this transitional period in return for tax abatements and a sizable workforce. The factory would close in under fifteen years, a short blip in the industrial history of Newark overlooked by its labor historians. This paper seeks to analyze the ways in which Ideal Toy represented the potential that the city government believed Newark possessed at this crucial time, and the realities that its workers in the Ironbound struggled against due to deindustrialization, racism, poor labor conditions, and a union that did not, or would not, support those on the assembly line.

You've Got Nothing to Lose But Your Job

In 1979, Newarkers gathered at Project Encounter, the home of an initiative by the local organization El Club Del Barrio to protect housing and low-income tenants, to watch the newest performance by Mass Transit Street Theater. The troupe of ten men and women, originating in the Bronx as a collection of actors interested in using theatrical performance to promote social justice, debuted their play “You’ve Got Nothing to Lose But Your Job.” The story was one that Newark

was living firsthand: office workers rallied together after being informed that their jobs were moving to the suburbs and they were being terminated. The workers formed a union and called for a boycott of their employer, and their efforts culminated in a strike that would be shut down by the courts. The play ended with a sit-in, during which the workers were carried off by the police and arrested, but the workers' attitude of empowerment remained strong as they proclaimed themselves part of a larger movement of organizing and rebellion across the country. After the actors took their final bow, audience members split into groups to discuss how the elements of the play reflected the real world that Newark's laborers and community organizers struggled in.¹

The play's sponsors, the Newark Coalition for Neighborhoods and the Ironbound Community Corporation, and its topic, the effects of deindustrialization and the last gasp of union strength before union-busting began tearing down worker protections, showed the many ways labor relations had impacted Newark so far. But this story did not start in 1979 at this small venue, as high rates of unemployment and flight of major corporations from what had once been a hub of factories and industry had begun long before. To reach a better understanding of why "You've Got Nothing to Lose But Your Job" was such a poignant reflection of these urban struggles, it is worth diving into a case study, when one corporation emerged seemingly as the solution to Newark's decline and the Ironbound neighborhood's widespread poverty. This corporation would become a hotbed for labor organizing, a common enemy of Newark's most active community organizers, and an eventual disappointment for those who sought to make Newark once more an industrial powerhouse. Its workers would face a similar fate to the ones portrayed on stage, losing a battle in the fight to win a war. This corporation was Ideal Toy, the inventor of the teddy bear, and though

¹ Roxanne Cruz, "You've Got Nothing to Lose But Your Job," *Ironbound Voices*, (May, 1979), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices197905a/page/n3/mode/2up>

its time in Newark has been long forgotten, there is much to learn from the toy company's history beyond its most famous invention.

A common theme in the labor studies field is how smaller actions by labor that did not necessarily end in victory for striking workers, nor change unemployment and poverty where the strikes occurred, were still significant. Two examples about the Northeast include *The Red Thread* by Jacob A. Zumoff, which focuses on the 1926 Passaic Textile strike, and "Dark Chocolate: Lessons from the 1937 Hershey Sit-Down Strike" by Robert E Weir. Zumoff contrasts the Passaic Silk Strike with New Jersey's more famous Paterson Silk Strike, using Passaic as an example of the oft-overlooked role of Communist organizers in labor leadership prior to the Great Depression.² Weir also contrasts two strikes, the 1936 Flint Sit-Down strike and the 1937 Hershey Sit-Down Strike, warning that the latter's failure reveals key issues with the sit-down as a strategy, which are missed when historians only study the former's success.³ While both these strikes failed to improve labor conditions, the resulting research revealed important truths about the political and economic spheres of each decade, enriching our historical knowledge by putting those underrepresented in labor studies at the forefront.

Deindustrialization, in which factory workers of the mid-20th century became unemployed on a mass scale when factories would abandon a city entirely, is another common theme in the labor studies field. One example focuses on a different New Jersey city, referenced in the first chapter of Jefferson Cowie's book *Capital Moves*. Cowie writes about the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) moving its famous production plant in Camden to cities with cheaper labor costs in Indiana and eventually Mexico. The effect of such a large factory shutdown, which Cowie

² Zumoff, Jacob A. 2021. *The Red Thread : The Passaic Textile Strike*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

³ Weir, Robert E. 2014. "Dark Chocolate: Lessons from the 1937 Hershey Sit-down Strike." *Labor History* 56 (1): 40–57. doi:10.1080/0023656X.2015.991562.

describes as “a more subtle process of cutbacks, attrition, and the gradual relocation or elimination of industrial jobs,”⁴ neutralized the power of organized labor in what was becoming a major union town to avoid paying high wages and to keep workers in separate regions in competition with one another. These acts especially targeted women, who suffered from wage discrimination, and the strong multiethnic coalitions that existed in Northern immigrant cities like Camden. An entire industrial ecosystem hinged on just a few corporations, and as a result corporate leaders held significant power with the livelihoods of so many workers on the line.

While known to labor historians, these stories are missing from Newark’s historical record. I seek to rectify this absence by analyzing the Ideal Toy factory’s existence in direct conversation with the decline of Newark’s industrial economic power and the rise in community coalitions and labor organizing following the aftermath of the 1967 rebellion. To do so, I relied on local newspapers from the mid-20th century. The *Newark Evening News* and the *Newark Star-Ledger* offer a clear view of the evolution of workers’ actions: first the walkout, then picketing, and lastly marching through Newark’s public parks. The newspapers also show how the Ideal Toy factory was a piece of a larger struggle that formed in response to Newark’s broader concern for its economic interests and stakeholders. I also relied on community newsletters. *Ironbound Voices*, published by the Ironbound Community Corporation from 1980 to 2001, gives the perspective of the activists, organizers, and community leaders and favors the people of the Ironbound over industry. By using both newspapers and newsletters, the saga of Ideal Toy’s time in Newark becomes a fully fleshed reflection of this unique period in the city’s history.

By the time it closed in 1985, the highly anticipated and short-lived existence of the Ideal Toy factory in Newark’s Ironbound neighborhood came to represent the prioritization of

⁴ Cowie, Jefferson. 1999. *Capital Moves : RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*. Ithaca, New York; Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501723568>.

redevelopment by the city government and the fight by community members against unemployment, poor labor conditions, and racial discrimination in the post-industrial 1970s.

Newark for Hire

In 1967, the Newark rebellion revealed decades of oppression and suppression of Newark's Black population, mostly crowded in the Central Ward. Existing racial tensions between the majority-white police force and the historically Black community exploded with episodes of looting and violent attacks on protestors. Although the rebellion has since been recognized as giving voice to those who had been silenced, the immediate response to the rebellion was not favorable. Coupled with suburbanization, families from what had been historically white ethnic enclaves fled the city. This phenomenon, known as white flight, shifted the demographics of the city significantly. In 1930, Newark's population was 91% white but had dropped to 44% by 1970.⁵

These fleeing groups deemed Newark too dangerous. Five years prior, a campaign report from mayoral candidate Hugh Addonizio put FBI crime data in bold font: "FIRST in rape! FIRST in robbery! FIRST in aggravated assault! FIRST in Burglary! FIRST in larceny! FIRST in auto theft! FOURTH in murder!"⁶ The report was titled "A Shocking Report about the Shame of Newark," implying that these problems were self-inflicted. Yet what the report did not include was the common denominator behind these crimes, which Newarkers were afflicted by rather than the cause of: poverty. Poverty led to evictions, homelessness, school absenteeism, and poor health

⁵ "Racial Wealth Divide in Newark," Prosperity Now, October 2019, https://prosperitynow.org/sites/default/files/resources/RWD_NEWARK_Profile.pdf.

⁶ Citizens Committee for Good Government, *A Shocking Report about the Shame of Newark* (Newark: 1962), 2.

among Newark residents. Although poverty was widespread—the 1970 census listed 85,000 Newarkers as below the poverty line—the local government provided little relief.⁷

The Newark Community Union Project, founded by members of the activist group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), presented to a congressional committee investigating the nationwide War on Poverty in 1965 that anti-poverty measures by the city were ineffective. They referenced in unforgiving terms the lack of support for and distrust of government fixes such as public housing projects and welfare, claiming that “whether these characterizations are accurate is almost beside the point, because poor people in large numbers feel they are accurate. The poor know that they have no access to, much less control over, these huge agencies that shape their conditions.”⁸ Another activist group, Youth Against War & Fascism, blamed government inaction for the deterioration of Newarkers’ quality of life. In a 1967 bulletin titled “Free our Black Brothers,” the Communist New York City youth organization lamented “The city and state authorities have let the ghetto fester and starve until the situation was absolutely unbearable.”⁹

These conditions, as was true in many urban centers across the country, were exceptionally worse for people of color. The Black Survival Bulletin, printed during the Newark Rebellion, cried out against racial injustice in how the city spent taxpayer money. “The white man is making war on us. He has in this town, shot us down like dogs, thrown our women and children against buildings, and stuck bayonets in our faces. Now the automatic weapons and armored vehicles and barbed wire. ALL OF WHICH COMES OUT OF YOUR POCKET, TO BE USED ON YOUR BEHIND!”¹⁰ Black residents would not be the only ones suffering in the city due to racial inequity.

⁷ “Low Income Neighborhoods in Large Cities: 1970,” 1970 Census of Population, May 1974, <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/resources/voliii/pubdocs/1970/Population/31679801no73-88ch15.pdf>.

⁸ Tom Hayden to Congressional Committee, April, 1965, Douglas Eldridge Collection, Newark Public Library, Newark.

⁹ Youth Against War & Fascism, *Free Our Black Brothers* (New York City: 1967), 1.

¹⁰ *Black Survival Bulletin*, 1967, Douglas Eldridge Collection, Newark Public Library, Newark.

In the mid-20th century, waves of immigrants began to arrive in the city's industrial neighborhood known as the Ironbound. They were mainly Central and South Americans and Puerto Ricans, a demographic that the census would define in 1970 for the first time as a separate ethnic group: "Hispanic." Hispanic Newarkers in the Ironbound faced much of the same issues as the Central Ward, neglected by anti-poverty programs. In response, in 1972, the New Jersey Chapter of the Young Lords occupied the headquarters of the program tasked with distributing these funds, the United Community Corporation. Ramon Rivera, the head of the chapter, recognized early on that the scarcity of resources was one part of a bigger picture, in which Hispanic groups had a growing population but little power to represent themselves. In an oral history of the Puerto Rican uprising of 1974, Rivera asked and answered "Peoples always ask the question: are riots due to poverty or unemployment?...if that were the case, we would riot everyday, twice a day, because we are poor everyday."¹¹

As Rivera suggests, unemployment was considered a major factor behind Newark's impoverished state. Newark was deeply affected by the countrywide deindustrialization of its inner cities as factories moved either to states with fewer labor protections, such as in the South, or out of the country entirely. Newark's Ronson Inc, General Instrument Corp, and Ward Foods all abandoned ship and left their employees behind in the process.¹² When General Instrument moved production overseas to Taiwan, 900 employees lost their jobs, pension benefits, and life insurance. When asked about the company's decision, Richard P. Lynch of the NJ AFL-CIO explained that "These big corporations have figured how much cheaper it would be to run away from their veteran employees with established pension increases and at the same time avoid the younger employees

¹¹ Ramon Rivera, interview by Vivian Lanzlot, October 26, 1988, transcript, Latino Oral History Collection, Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ.

¹² David Sandler, "County Commerce: Revitalizing the Economy in Essex," *Newark Star-Ledger*, June 25, 1975, 40.

who are moving into pension rights.”¹³ Newark’s companies gained cheap overseas labor and their former employees lost their hopes of retirement.

The most crushing blow for Newark, however, was the loss of the Ballantine Brewery on March 31, 1972, a day so traumatic for the Ironbound that it was called “Black Friday.”¹⁴ The Ballantine Brewery, a Newark staple producing beer since 1840, had suffered a loss of 3.2 million in 1971 and by the next year was purchased by Falstaff Brewing Corporation. The Ballantines were a prominent Newark family in the mid-19th century, but Falstaff had no such loyalty to the city and looked to move production elsewhere. Even though it was a slow death—the company had already forced employees to give up vacation time and expected pay raises—it was terrible nonetheless. Warehouse worker Tony Saltys, in an article published eight years later in *Ironbound Voices*, recalled the devastation that the factory’s closing had on its workers who were already living through an economic crisis. “We came into work March 31 and they told us that was it. We didn’t believe it. We just sat in the plant for 7 or 8 hours. We pulled a sit-in, but it didn’t help...It was a total shock. I’m in shock yet.”¹⁵ Workers received no severance and many lost their pension rights. Two hundred workers would be rehired, but the rest had few options beyond retiring or searching for new work. Many of the brewery’s former employees had been there over 30 years and finding new work at their age was difficult. The loss of the factory not only hurt its employees but the surrounding community as well, which was built around the century-old building. Small businesses were especially affected, as their success relied on serving the company’s almost 2,000 employees.¹⁶

¹³ Tom Gallagher, “‘Runaway’ Plants Leave Chaos Behind,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, August 20, 1972, 4.

¹⁴ “Black Friday-8 Years Later,” *Ironbound Voices*, (March 1980), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices198003a/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>

¹⁵ “Black Friday-8 Years Later.”

¹⁶ “Happier Times are Brewing at Ballantine Site,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, February 5, 1976, 28.

Our story will stay in the Ironbound, as the city was about to attract what looked to be Newark's savior in its battle against unemployment and industrial abandonment. Newark was about to spend thousands in taxpayer dollars to revitalize the East Ward and hopefully bring new jobs to the city's most densely populated and ethnically diverse neighborhood.

Ideal Toy to Save the Day

Needing more opportunities to employ its workers and a way to bounce back in the eyes of its people and the world, Newark began looking for ways to draw in new investment to stem the bleeding. The state of New Jersey had already formed the Economic Development Authority (EDA) to provide low-cost financing and loans to industry that wished to move to New Jersey. The state also passed the Fox-Lance Act in 1961, which allowed for a reduction on taxes for a building up to 15 years after construction. Newark used the act more than any other city in the state, 36 times, and Jersey City was in second with 16.¹⁷ According to EDA member Carlos Villamil, "We've been showing companies they can find bargains in the inner cities: There are good existing buildings at reasonable prices, with utilities and transportation already intact."¹⁸ The Ironbound was especially fortuitous in its transportation, thanks to its location near the railroads, Port Newark, and the newly constructed Newark Airport. The state even took out full-page ads in the lifestyle magazine *Metro Newark!*, quoting Governor Brendan Byrne while detailing the many ways in which New Jersey would be the best place for a company to move to. The ads highlighted the state's proximity to New York City, its ability to ship goods easily and affordably, and claimed that over \$1 billion had already been put toward financing businesses by 1980. In this ad, the

¹⁷ Madelyn Hoffman, "Give Us A Break (Part II)," *Ironbound Voices*, (November/December, 1980), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices29537a/page/n1/mode/2up?q=ideal+toy>

¹⁸ David Sandler, "County Commerce: Revitalizing the Economy in Essex," 40.

product being sold was New Jersey itself, and the state was up front about being a friend to business first. One of the final lines makes that clear, exclaiming “Yes, now more than ever, New Jersey’s got it! Today’s most profitable business location and a business environment where concern for your bottom line starts at the top.”¹⁹

The project that hoped to breathe life back into the Ironbound became known as the Newark Meadowlands Industrial Complex, the combined effort of the Newark Economic Development Commission (NEDC) and the Newark Redevelopment Agency. The NEDC, holding one seat of the Newark Real Estate Commission, had multiple goals for improving the city’s economy through industrial growth. These goals included promoting new commercial activity, becoming a resource for entrepreneurs who needed city assistance for development and construction, and to improve the city’s tarnished image from in decline to once more on the rise.²⁰ For the most part, the NEDC offered assistance to small businesses, but the Meadowlands project was about to be its most ambitious project yet. Once constructed, the first plant on the property would “represent the largest single development of manufacturing facilities in Newark since World War 2” according to the *Newark Evening News*.²¹

Meanwhile, as Newark searched for more industry to save its struggling economy, New York City was moving in a different direction. Throughout the late 60s and early 70s, New York City faced an increasingly dire financial problem as the city was unable to make as much as it was spending. Deindustrialization had hit the Big Apple as well, and several large employers closed, such as the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1966, at the time the state’s oldest continually active industrial

¹⁹ “New Jersey’s Location: It’s Your Competitive Edge!,” *Metro Newark*, June, 1980, 43.

²⁰ Barbara Kulka, Bruce Bailey and Monica Maske, “Municipalities: Holding Firm,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, January 25, 1976, 17.

²¹ Evening News Staff Writer, “Ideal Toy Project to Start Tomorrow,” *The Newark Evening News*, April 14, 1971, 8.

plant.²² According to a 1993 study done by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, from 1969 to 1976 the city lost 600,000 jobs. Unemployment would not begin to decline until the early 80s, during which the city began its transition from industrial to post-industrial. “While there were massive employment losses in manufacturing...there was major growth in services, finance and construction.”²³ This pivot led to an investment in the expansion of the arts and entertainment, the most relevant of which were sports stadiums. Yankee Stadium received a major renovation in 1976 after sports teams began fleeing the city for shinier, nicer stadiums elsewhere. In 1958, the city had lost the Brooklyn Dodgers when Ebbets Field fell into disrepair, and in 1971, the New York Giants moved to Giants Stadium located within New Jersey’s Meadowlands Sports Complex.²⁴ The city poured \$24 million into Yankee Stadium to make up for these losses, and while renovations were underway, the team played at the Mets’ Shea Stadium, which was built 10 years on land originally intended for a factory. The company that had lost out on the land? Ideal Toy Corporation.

Ideal Toy was by far New York City’s most famous toy company, creators of the beloved teddy bear and the brand that decades later would bring the Rubik’s Cube to the United States. Founded in Brooklyn in 1903 by candy shop owners Morris and Rose Michtom, Ideal Toy’s success led to an expansion first to Brownsville in Brooklyn by the 1920s and later to Queens, where they set up a factory and offices in the Hollis neighborhood. By the 1960s, Ideal Toy was looking to move again and this time they set their sights on land in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Left abandoned following the end of the 1964 World’s Fair, the open space seemed like the

²²“History of the Yard,” Brooklyn Navy Yard, August 23, 2023, <https://www.brooklynnavyyard.org/history/>.

²³ Samuel M Ehrenhalt, “Economic and Demographic Change: The Case of New York City,” *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1993, 40–50, <https://doi.org/https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1993/02/art4full.pdf>.

²⁴ Rory Costello, “Shea Stadium (New York),” Society for American Baseball Research, March 10, 2021, <https://sabr.org/bioproj/park/shea-stadium-new-york/>.

perfect place to expand their manufacturing operations. Yet the company would get overlooked by Mayor John Lindsay, who saw the financial boon a stadium could bring to the forgotten park. The city also lacked a team in the National League following the loss of the Dodgers, and with constant conflict in all 5 boroughs, the city needed a unifying force to root for. With all this in mind, the NYC Commissioner of Economic Development put it best: “John Lindsay decided he’d rather have a baseball stadium there than a toy factory.”²⁵ Shea Stadium opened in 1964 and Ideal Toy would look across the Hudson to a city much friendlier to manufacturing interests.

Ideal Toy offered solutions to Newark’s problems, at least those defined as problems by its politicians and news outlets. First, Ideal Toy could lure other manufacturing into the region on its coattails. Ideal Toy would be the flagship factory for the Newark Meadowlands Industrial Complex. With one company on the site, hopefully more would follow. This quickly became a reality. Alongside Ideal Toy, Celanese Corp and International Harvester moved into the complex at the start of the decade and by 1976, 38 companies including WR Grace & Co and Newark Boxboard Co were tenants in buildings that filled up three-quarters of the available space.²⁶ In a *Newark Star-Ledger* article titled “Happier Times are Brewing at Ballantine Site,” the author emphasized the role that Ideal Toy had in the site’s revitalization, noting “demand for space in the refurbished facility was ‘very light’ until Ideal Toy moved in.”²⁷

Secondly, Ideal Toy could help with image control. The city suffered from a severe image problem, as evidenced by the public statements made by candidates of the 1970 mayoral election, the first after the 1967 uprising. Harry L. Wheeler, in an early press release, gave a grim description

²⁵ “Ideal Toy Corp. Moving Queens Offices to Jersey,” *The New York Times*, May 14, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/14/nyregion/ideal-toy-corp-moving-queens-offices-to-jersey.html>.

²⁶ David Sandler, “County Commerce: Essex Strives Towards Redevelopment,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, October 29, 1975, 36.

²⁷ “Happier Times are Brewing at Ballantine Site,” 28.

of the city he was looking to run. “It must be conceded that it is highly possible that Newark’s most recent and tragic events...have shattered any hope for and confidence in the city’s ability to survive...the ‘social and fiscal’ ills of Newark are monumental.”²⁸ Hugh Addonizio, now the incumbent, painted a picture of a city tired of “crime, spilled garbage, the bad manners of our neighbors and all the other things which seem to surround us,” claiming the only solution was the continued funding of his urban renewal projects.²⁹ Even Kenneth Gibson, who went on to win the election, lauded his potential victory as the repositioning of Newark out of its fallen status. “The world will then know that the majority of the citizens of Newark have come to their senses and that the city has surmounted its first hurdle on the road back.”³⁰

Ideal Toy could not fix all these issues (they were simply too entrenched in the fabric of the city’s economy), but it could address the issue of image through its products—toys. Newark’s manufacturing past had been breweries and the production of leather, polluting the ground and the nearby Passaic River. It was also in the business of chemicals, most infamously the production of Agent Orange that would be used to contaminate vegetation, and those hidden within it, with toxins during the Vietnam War. Although these industries were financially successful, they were unseemly and in some cases, openly attacked by members of Newark’s Ironbound Committee Against Toxic Waste and even Mayor Sharpe James in 1987.³¹

A toy factory, however, could be billed as a place straight out of the North Pole. Newark already had a long history of commercial success through department stores, the most famous being Bambergers and Hahne & Company. Both were on the downturn by the mid-century but the city still sought a way to keep locally-sourced products on the minds of parents during the holiday

²⁸ “Elect Harry L. Wheeler” (Newark: 1970), 2.

²⁹ Citizens for Hugh J. Addonizio, *Mayor Hugh J. Addonizio: The One for All* (Newark: 1970), 2.

³⁰ Kenneth Gibson, (statement, Business Men’s Breakfast at Robert Treat Hotel, Newark, NJ, June 11, 1970).

³¹ Press Release (Newark Public Information Office, Newark: 1987), 1.

season. In December 1980, the *Newark Star-Ledger* published an article entitled “Toys Reflect Holiday Delight in the Factory and On the Shelf,” which listed the hottest toys as the Super-Stunt Dirt Bike, the Rubik’s Cube, the Total Control model racing car, and a Snuggles doll.³² Before highlighting the Christmas spirit at each department store, selling Shetland sweaters and making grand displays of gumdrops, the author walked with Richard Weintraub, the Vice President of Operations at Ideal Toy, through the different sections of the factory. At the end “Weintraub was asked whether children, seeing toys made, ever lost a feeling of the ‘magic’ of Christmas, ‘I don’t think so’ he said.”³³ The factory, to the touring children, was now an integral part of the magic-making. The article would also go on to call attention to the company’s charitable efforts, donating toys to community organizations. By associating Ideal Toy with Bambergers and Hahne, Ideal Toy could easily be regarded as the newest institution in the city’s most wholesome economic output.

Ideal Toy could even be used to represent Newark on an international scale, as was done in 1978. A Newark delegation consisting of city council members, Deputy Mayor Ramon Aneses, and a Newark Spanish soccer team traveled to the Spanish city of La Coruna, where they were honored at a reception by its mayor Manuel Liano Flores. After gifting Flores a commemorative plaque, the Newark delegation recognized La Coruna as Newark’s sister city across the sea. Flores proclaimed “From this balcony in the Atlantic, La Coruna, we look upon that other balcony in America, Newark...extending our hands as a symbol of genuine friendship.”³⁴ To solidify this friendship, the Newark city council presented toys created by Newark’s Ideal Toy factory to be given to a local children’s hospital. In this instance, Ideal Toy became not just a model company, but a world ambassador.

³² Frederick Byrd, “Toys Reflect Holiday Delight in the Factory and On the Shelf,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, December 15, 1980, 1.

³³ Frederick Byrd, “Toys Reflect Holiday Delight in the Factory and On the Shelf,” 1.

³⁴ Raul Davila, “Newark...La Coruna: The Sister Cities,” *Information*, November, 1978, 21.

Lastly, and most significantly, Ideal Toy offered relief from well over a decade of unemployment issues. A toy factory requires thousands of workers to work the assembly lines, manage the storage of completed products, and to make sure products are shipped in a timely manner. The first phase of construction, which would cover 30 of the 95 total acres owned by the Newark Housing Authority, consisted of a 600,000 square foot plant that was projected to require up to 1,800 employees. This was meant to be just the beginning. According to an article written in 1968, “When the 95 acres are used, Ideal reportedly will employ from 8,000 to 10,000 persons in 2 million square feet.”³⁵ These numbers never came to fruition. In 1985, as the factory closed, it was revealed that even at the height of production the number of employees never hit 2,000.³⁶ Yet when construction started in 1971, the city government was convinced that the investment was worthwhile, both in solving its unemployment crisis and drawing in other companies looking to hire as well.

In return, the city provided many logistical and financial incentives for companies looking for a new place to build a factory. The biggest draw they offered was exactly what New York City could not: financial support. In Newark, Ideal Toy was eligible for tax abatements under the aforementioned Fox-Lance Act, in which the company could avoid paying hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes. Just prior to construction, the project was estimated to cost \$6.6 million. Of this, the federal Economic Development Administration would lend the company \$4.29 million toward construction. In addition to tax abatements, the city of Newark would also offer assistance through the use of urban renewal funds toward the stabilization of the marshland.³⁷ This was no

³⁵ Bob Shabazian, “Toymaker Gets Aid to Build in Newark,” *The Newark Evening News*, June 25, 1968, 1.

³⁶ Scott Muldoon, “CBS Toy Winds Down Vast Newark Operation,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, June 28, 1985, 24.

³⁷ Bob Shabazian, “Toymaker Gets Aid to Build in Newark,” 1.

small project, but with thousands of possible jobs on the line, the potential seemed to outweigh any and all costs for the city government.

Although tax abatements and other financial assistance were great news for the company, not everyone was pleased with the arrangement. For every dollar that Ideal Toy did not pay in taxes, that was a dollar that the people of Newark did not get back toward their roads, schools, and other desperately needed government services. A 1980 article in *Ironbound Voices*, titled “Give Us a Break (Part II),” found great fault in the dodging of taxes by corporations in Newark. These companies included Englehard Chemicals, which avoided paying \$600,000 a year; PSEG; Ironbound Plaza; and Ideal Toy. Ideal Toy saved \$500,000 a year through tax abatements, and when the argument of attracting development was brought up, the author dismissed it as an excuse to promote tax breaks. “The corporations, however, always plead poverty...they get the government to give them tax breaks so that they can make even more money while we have to pay their share of the taxes as well as our own.”³⁸ Regardless of these concerns, by 1980, Ideal Toy would be fully integrated into Newark’s economy. If Newark’s taxpayers and workers wanted their voices heard, it would take more than articles in a newsletter. It was time for action.

Labor Strikes Back

In the 1970s, workers across the country walked out of their jobs and onto the streets, picket signs in hand. From lettuce farmers in Sacramento to the staff at the *New York Times* in Manhattan, poor labor conditions pushed workers to a point in which they were willing to sacrifice their pay for weeks on end with the goal of gaining better wages, working conditions, and unions. Newark

³⁸ Hoffman. “Give Us A Break (Part II).”

was a part of this movement, accounting for 25 percent of all New Jersey strikers in 1975.³⁹ One of the most notable strikes of the decade was the 1970 postal strike, in which Newark was at the forefront for New Jersey.

The 1970 postal strike began in New York City, where the city's leaders of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) began what the National Postal Museum considers "the first and largest walkout ever against the Federal Government."⁴⁰ Around 200,000 workers across the country stopped delivering the mail, protesting low wages and demanding retirement benefits. The mail carriers had the government in a bind, as important documentation from the 1970 census and draft notices were on the docket for distribution. The stakes were high, in Newark especially. On March 23, the *Newark Evening News* reported that the National Guard had the potential to be rolled into the city for the first time since the 1967 rebellion. Guard units and Jeeps were already stationed across the country for soldiers who would take the place of the more experienced and efficient mail carriers, and New Jersey had 500 Jeeps at hand if necessary.⁴¹ Several local postal unions had already voted to return to work in Trenton, New Brunswick, Camden, South Orange, and Atlantic City. Jersey City, Hackensack, Paterson, Elizabeth, and Newark voted to stay on strike. Angelo Veneziano, head of Newark's Chapter 38, led his union to vote unanimously to continue the walkout, announcing that "The membership does not want to hurt the public...but we have been left without any other course. We feel we have a just cause."⁴² The city had so much to lose if the National Guard returned, but the local postal union stayed strong and called on the

³⁹ Edward C. Burks, "Strikes in State Dipped in 1975," *The New York Times*, September 5, 1976, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/09/05/archives/new-jersey-weekly-strikes-in-state-dipped-in-1975-strikes-in-state.html>.

⁴⁰ "Postal Strike and Reorganization: Reinventing the System," National Postal Museum, accessed March 13, 2025, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/research-articles/the-history-and-experience-of-african-americans-in-america%E2%80%99s-postal-service/postal>.

⁴¹ Warren H. Kennet, "Door-to-Door Mail Unlikely for Guard," *The Newark Evening News*, March 23, 1970, 4.

⁴² Warren H. Kennet, "Door-to-Door Mail Unlikely for Guard," 4.

national leadership of the NALC to support their strike.

A decade later on September 12, 1980, a documentary focused on the postal worker strikes was shown at the Ironbound Community School, an alternative elementary school formed in 1970 by local parents as part of the larger Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC). The ICC was, and still is, a community organization that supports public health initiatives, educational initiatives, social programs for the elderly, anti-pollution measures, and other concerns for the people of the Ironbound. The Ironbound Cultural Committee, another division of the ICC, would also show films that supported labor rights in collaboration with the Ideal Toy Workers for a Better Contract. In the article “Signed, Sealed & Delivered” in *Ironbound Voices*, author John Dillon would connect the struggle of the postal workers to the workers at Ideal Toy. “The postal workers have been fighting for two years to get their jobs back, the Ideal Toy workers have just begun. The solidarity shown by the postal workers shows that the struggle for human rights (especially in the workplace) will be a hard struggle, but one worth fighting for.”⁴³ The struggle to which Dillon refers to started at Ideal Toy four months earlier and would be an example of another strike started by an unofficial walkout without the support of a union, also known as a wildcat strike.

In the years following the 1974 opening of the Ideal Toy factory, tension between the workers, the union, and the company quickly developed. This is most evident in a 1979 article from *Ironbound Voices*, written by labor leader Ron “Slim” Washington in the leadup to what became the largest labor struggle the factory endured during its time in Newark. The article describes the workforce living mainly in the Ironbound as “large numbers of unemployed women, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and recent Portuguese immigrant workers that would accept the minimum

⁴³ John Dillon, “Signed, Sealed & Delivered: Labor Struggle in the Post Office”, *Ironbound Voices*, (September/October, 1980), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices29474a/page/n7/mode/2up>

wage.”⁴⁴ A union was formed, but it was lacking leadership and members had little say over decisions as no meetings were held. Not much information exists about the initial structure of the union, but there was no formal grievance procedure nor could workers vote on the contract. Meanwhile, conditions in the factory got worse as employees were underpaid and denied bathroom breaks. In 1978 a group of employees formed the Committee to Fight for a Better Contract with the goals of fighting for union democracy and better working conditions. Notably, according to the article, this group was dedicated to reaching its goals, “with the union or without the union.”⁴⁵ The committee quickly made gains within the union, winning workers the ability to file grievances and vote on contracts. Yet two years later, in 1980, the union was still struggling to meet the expectations of its members and the newsletter would once more report that employees faced sexual harassment and racial discrimination. That spring, employees began to take action by putting up new candidates to run against the current union leadership. However, the workers of Ideal Toy would decide well before the November elections that they had enough of poor working conditions and inadequate representation. On May 19th, without the official support of the union, the Ideal Toy factory walkout began.

That day, wildcat striking workers stepped away from the assembly line to protest the firing of 35 employees, and the threat to fire 140 more, over the phenomenon known as “double-dipping.” Prior to fully analyzing the strike, it is important to understand just how employment at the Ideal Toy factory operated throughout the year as these specifics played a part in each worker’s decision making and their eventual firing. Most jobs at the factory were seasonal, in which an employee would be hired for anywhere from 2 to 5 months. These hirings were in preparation for

⁴⁴ Ron Washington, “Workers Organize at Ideal Toy,” *Ironbound Voices*, (May, 1979), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices197905a/page/n1/mode/2up?view=theater>

⁴⁵ Washington, “Workers Organize at Ideal Toy.”

Christmas, during the late summer and fall, to have toys shipped out by December. In describing the Queens factory, which continued to operate by 1975 as the country's third largest, the *New York Times* noted that on Christmas Eve the factory was deserted. "Only four months ago, the Ideal Toy Corporation factory at 184-10 Jamaica Avenue in Hollis bustled 24 hours a day and employed 3,000 workers. But for most of them, the Christmas season ended more than a month ago."⁴⁶ In between seasons, employees in Newark filed for unemployment, collecting checks until being rehired in the spring or finding new employment. With few job prospects in 1980, and a pay of just \$3.30 an hour, 35 production workers made up for lost work time by continuing to receive unemployment after being rehired.⁴⁷ When the company discovered the double-dipping, it immediately terminated the workers and refused to re-hire them, even though they promised to repay the money back to the city. This permanent firing was the last straw for the Ideal Toy factory workers.

This would not be the first strike by workers of the company. In 1932, a strike of doll workers in New York City included all those represented in the city by the Doll and Toy Makers Union, a member of the AFL. When workers in Ideal Toy's Brownsville factory walked out due to low wages, the company offered them a 15 percent wage increase if they returned. The American Communist Party's newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, would report that the workers refused the increase to support the union. The union then signed a contract that allowed "the bosses to keep all the scabs imported during the strike. It [kept] wages down to 15 and 25 a week, by allowing to classify workers with many years of experience as 'helpers.'"⁴⁸ The company rescinded the wage

⁴⁶ Pranay Gupte, "A Queens Toy Plant Looks to Christmas- 1973," *The New York Times*, December 24, 1972, <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/12/24/archives/a-queens-toy-plant-looks-to-christmas-1973-toy-factory-looking-to.html>.

⁴⁷ Ron Washington, "Ideal Toyworkers Continue Fight to Win Back Their Jobs," *Ironbound Voices* (July, 1980), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices198007a/page/n3/mode/2up>

⁴⁸ "Doll Workers Expose Sell Out," *The Daily Worker*, September 23, 1932, 3.

increase offer after five weeks of striking.

A misalignment between union leadership and membership would occur again in 1980, as the union was hesitant to act after the walkout on May 19th. Referring again to the Ron Washington article, the union initially pushed back against arbitration. This was after years of passivity and corruption; Washington claims that the union leadership “threatened the life of one of the leaders of the workers, and generally [went] along with the company to prevent the workers from becoming organized.”⁴⁹ Washington later became the unofficial spokesperson for the striking workers, writing several articles for *Ironbound Voices* and appearing at mass gatherings. Prior to working in Newark, he lived in Jersey City as a member of multiethnic Communist labor organizations such as the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and Workers Viewpoint (WVO). In an autobiographical article about the rise of these coalitions during the 1970s, Washington referred to his time at Ideal Toy as influenced by his grassroots background. “I, in 1977, eventually got a job at Ideal Toy, and attempted to put all of my organizing experience at work in developing a fightback amongst the workers there. For the first time in many years, I was on my own without organizational support.”⁵⁰ Washington may not have had a formal political organization anymore, but he was about to have the backing of many diverse coalitions already present within the Ironbound.

Immediately after the walkout, during which the strikers demanded that all fired workers be reinstated, 3 more workers were fired. The remaining workers were then sent a telegram by the company calling for their return to work, to which there would be no penalty. Fearful for their jobs, many complied. But not all would be rehired, and Washington claimed that those refused re-

⁴⁹ Ron Washington, “Ideal Toyworkers Continue Fight to Win Back Their Jobs,”

⁵⁰ Ron Washington, “The Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) Or as was said in the “Bronx Tale,” There’s Nothing Worse Than Wasted Potential,” Marxists Internet Archive, August 4, 2009, <https://marxists.architexturez.net/history/erol/ncm-1a/rwl-history.pdf>

entry were “the most militant workers, the leaders of a two year struggle for better working conditions.”⁵¹ A community delegation quickly formed, serving as a support group for the Ideal workers who remained unemployed. The participants represented organizations such as the New Jersey Tenants Organization, the Black Leadership Conference (BLC), Essex County’s chapter of the civil rights group Operation PUSH, and local churches. With the support of these groups, especially the Black-led BLC and the majority Brazilian St. Stephan’s Church, the wildcat strikers came to represent the growing rainbow of ethnicities that made up the Ironbound neighborhood.

From May 19th to May 21st, picketing began with varying numbers of demonstrators. Eighty demonstrators showed up that Monday, but the number dwindled to 20 by Wednesday.⁵² On Tuesday, the protestors were forced to disperse by noon and conditions continued to deteriorate as the action was condemned by New York City’s Amalgamated Industrial Toy and Novelty Workers Union. The president of the union, Julius Isaacson, claimed in a *Newark Star-Ledger* article that the strike had been initiated by “Maoist Communist Party members” and leaflets with Marxist-Leninist writing were found scattered around the factory.⁵³ Although Ron Washington did come from a Marxist background, he denied the claim that the strike had any specific political leanings or preferred ideology. The largest rally of picketers occurred a week later on May 28th as 150 workers, their families, and community supporters arrived at the Ideal Toy factory in protest of the firings. The action was organized by the Organization for Labor Action in East Orange and the BLC, and the Ironbound Community Corporation provided significant support. The demonstration lasted 2 hours, and picketers held signs in English and Spanish, such as “All Out Until All Come Back! Todos Listos Hasta Todos Vienen Atrás!”⁵⁴ Yet, by the start of the summer,

⁵¹ Ron Washington. “Ideal Toyworkers Continue Fight to Win Back Their Jobs.”

⁵² Beth Fitzgerald, “Ideal Toy is Picketed in Double-Dip Firings,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, May 21, 1980, 38.

⁵³ Beth Fitzgerald, “Ideal Toy is Picketed in Double-Dip Firings,” 38.

⁵⁴ Ron Washington. “Ideal Toyworkers Continue Fight to Win Back Their Jobs.”

it was becoming apparent that walkouts and picketing alone were not enough.

On July 10th, 20 Ideal employees arrived at the Newark City Council meeting asserting that their firing was in response to their support of other fired employees. Ron Washington would speak for the group, explaining that 65 workers had been fired and promises made at a previous meeting with Councilmen Martinez and Tucker had not been followed through. Washington justified the actions of those who double-dipped as desperation, a way to make ends meet, and emphasized that “all of them have families and do not want to go on welfare.”⁵⁵ Councilman Tucker responded, confirming that he had met with Washington, as well as an investigator from the State Unemployment Commission Fund. The investigator claimed that several double-dipping employees had taken \$5,000 from the unemployment fund for two years. Tucker then spoke to the president of Ideal Toy, who informed him that when the case went to arbitration, the company was victorious. Councilman Martinez made note to the council that he was willing to speak to the Ideal Toy president once more but was concerned that little could be done. According to the state investigator, any employee who had double-dipped “committed fraud to the state of New Jersey, fraud to the taxpayers, and the company.”⁵⁶ By the end of the meeting, the council considered themselves powerless, believing that all they could do was to urge the company to negotiate.⁵⁷ The final nail on the coffin, in the council’s opinion, was the lack of union pressure to act further. Neither the government nor the established union were going to help reinstate the fired employees or their supporters.

After the unsuccessful City Council meeting, the workers at Ideal Toy left the factory

⁵⁵ Newark Municipal Council Minutes, June 4, 1980, Newark Library Main Collection, Newark Public Library, 52.

⁵⁶ Newark Library Main Collection, Newark Public Library, 52.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, it was fraud for taxpayers to have to pay for double-dipping employees avoiding putting their families on welfare, yet the legal tax abatements covered by the taxpayer to construct the company site received no such scrutiny.

grounds and took to the streets as the final culmination of their organizing that summer. On July 19th, workers at Ideal Toy organized a march with workers at PSEG who were frustrated by a string of recent layoffs and how few Newarkers were hired to construct the energy company's new building. Like Ideal Toy, PSEG had received tax abatements, of which both groups were now protesting along with violations of worker safety and affirmative action laws. The two groups started at Essex County College, marching down Market and Broad Streets before arriving in Military Park. This park had been a hotspot of union organizing, most recently as the location of a mass rally of striking teachers and their supporters during the 1970 Newark teachers strike.⁵⁸ Ron Washington would appear once again as a head organizer, alongside Musheer Robinson of the BLC and leaders of other Newark institutions such as Rev. Charles W McCoombs of St. Matthews United Methodist Church. For Washington and the Ideal Toy workers, they rallied for the 35 workers originally laid off, with Washington explaining "The people laid off have agreed to pay back the extra money. The real reason Ideal laid them off is to stop our Ideal Toy Committee to Fight for a Better Contract, opposing racism and sexism there."⁵⁹ Racism in the workplace was a common theme at the rally, and the fight against it was a uniting issue for employees of both companies. Addressing the multiracial crowd, a former PSEG employee Robert Kent saw these two struggles as part of a larger labor movement beyond Newark. "How can the city let them build here without employing our own people? I'm glad to see these issues are no longer black and white...We are all workers and we are tired of being mistreated in this nation."⁶⁰ Unemployment was also a major issue, as *Ironbound Voices* would report that over 100 people had rallied that day

⁵⁸ Frank A. Fiorito, *Anatomy of a Strike* (Newark: National Teachers Union, 1970), 8.

⁵⁹ Frederick W. Boyd, "Conditions Protested by Workers," *Newark Star-Ledger*, July 20, 1980, 22.

⁶⁰ Frederick W. Boyd, "Conditions Protested by Workers," 22.

in support of “jobs for everyone who is unemployed and wants to work.”⁶¹

After arriving at Military Park, the two groups discovered that they were not the only rally planned for that day. A separate, concurrent rally had also marched down Broad Street, with participants protesting draft registration. That year, President Jimmy Carter reactivated the draft in response to a Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and the US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the act unconstitutional due to the draft’s exclusion of women. Seventy-five local activists marched from Lincoln to Military Park in celebration, distributing leaflets and singing protest songs, just three months after the end of the war. The activists included members of the ACLU and NJ-CARD, the New Jersey Committee Against Registration. Upon meeting with the Ideal Toy strikers, the *Star-Ledger* reported that “Speakers from both rallies shared the stage to denounce racism, the draft, employment and labor conditions.”⁶² This coalition of anti-war activists, strikers, workers, and their supporters represented the many layers of the labor struggle in Newark and undercurrent of discontent with the institutions that refused to address it. It was a final hurrah before the decade would take a sharp turn toward conservative values and decidedly anti-union politics.

The rally was most likely the last major rally held by the striking Ideal Toy workers. After the fall of 1980, both the *Newark Star-Ledger* and *Ironbound Voices* ceased to mention any Ideal Toy strike, protests, or the Ideal Toy Workers for a Better Contract. As a result, most believe that the employees fired for double-dipping were never re-hired. Labor organizers moved onto other causes, most notably Ron Washington who founded Black Telephone Workers for Justice in 2000 with the goal of making Verizon recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a paid holiday.⁶³ But

⁶¹ “An Ideal March for Ideal Workers,” *Ironbound Voices*, (August, 1980), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices198008a/page/n1/mode/2up>

⁶² Linda R. Prout, “Activists Rally Against Draft,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, July 20, 1980, 5.

⁶³ “Black Telephone Workers Fight for MLK Holiday,” *People’s World*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/black-telephone-workers-fight-for-mlk-holiday/>.

the failure of a strike does not make its actions meaningless or its place in history any less valuable. The 1980 Ideal Toy walkout is significant because it clearly represents the major issues plaguing Newark at the time and the stakeholders affected on all sides. Both those originally fired for double-dipping and the workers who walked out and were temporarily fired for supporting them were motivated by the high rates of unemployment. Newark's financial incentives and prioritization of development was what led to Ideal Toy moving away from new operations in New York City and towards the city across the river. Organizations that rallied to support the Ideal Toy workers, like Project Encounter, the ICC, the rallying PSEG workers, NJ-CARD, and the Black Leadership Conference were all part of the prominent grassroots presence the Ironbound developed during that era. The story of Ideal Toy was, in its entirety, the story of Newark.

Conclusion

Just five years after the May 1980 walkout, all Ideal Toy operations closed in Newark. The working conditions in Ideal Toy during and after the walkout varied depending on who you asked and who was asking. The starkest contrast can be seen when comparing two different employees, Roberta Harris and Carrie Ralph. Harris was an assembly line worker in the factory during the 1980 Christmas season, just one of multiple employees interviewed by the *Newark Star-Ledger* in the previously mentioned "Toys Reflect Holiday Delight in the Factory and On the Shelf" article. When asked about her work, Harris replied "Making these dolls is almost like playing...It reminds me of children. I love to watch kids, my own or my friends, playing with these dolls."⁶⁴ It was work that didn't feel like work, but entertainment. Carrie Ralph did not have nearly as enjoyable an experience during her time at the factory. Ralph was present at the July 20th rally at Military Park, prior to which she had been terminated by Ideal Toy. In describing the work, she said, "They

⁶⁴ Frederick Byrd, "Toys Reflect Holiday Delight in the Factory and On the Shelf," 1.

slave-drive you down there, and when they saw I began to know what was going on, they got rid of me.”⁶⁵ As working conditions within the factory were disputed, those outside of it created concerns as well. That same year, the company began to crack down on alleged security risks. The Ironbound Manufacturers Association, of which Ideal Toy was a part, threatened that they would hire private police patrols if the city of Newark did not supply companies like United Airlines, DuPont, or 3M additional police protection.⁶⁶ Once more Ideal Toy was requesting preferential treatment by the city government, paid for by city funds.

Ideal Toy’s fall from grace was both quick and massively consequential for not only Newark but the entire state. In 1982, Ideal Toy moved its administrative offices, which up until that point had remained in Queens, to Newark to be closer to the Ironbound factory. That same year, the company would be bought out by CBS, whose toy division had been suffering for years, for \$58 million. Two years later in 1984, CBS moved the offices of its toy division to Secaucus as part of a downsizing effort due to low sales. It was CBS’s only unprofitable division, losing the company \$82 million. Around 140 workers were laid off in the process.⁶⁷ In June 1985, CBS pulled the plug on the Ideal Toy Factory in Newark entirely and announced that the company would be fully moved out by the end of the year. During its peak under CBS, Ideal employed 2,000 workers in the summer and an average of 500-600 the rest of the year. Production ended in the spring, with just 200 employees left in the summer for distribution purposes. Judith Sussman, CBS spokesperson, justified the move as a necessary cut as part of reconsolidation and restructuring involving multiple factories, and stated that the production capability in Lancaster, Pennsylvania,

⁶⁵ Frederick W. Boyd, “Conditions Protested by Workers,” 22.

⁶⁶ Jonas Livingston, “Ironbound Merchants Study ‘Private Patrols’,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, February 20, 1981, 22.

⁶⁷ “Ideal Toy Corp.. Moving Queens Offices to Jersey,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/14/nyregion/ideal-toy-corp-moving-queens-offices-to-jersey.html>.

was more than enough to satisfy the demand for toys.⁶⁸ An article in the *Star-Ledger* also pointed to an annual report by Ideal in 1981, which stated that “High U.S Labor costs have been forcing manufacturing of labor intensive components to offshore sources. This has reduced plant utilization resulting in an inability to fully cover fixed costs associated with manufacturing operations.”⁶⁹ This shift to offshore production was also at the center of an article five years earlier in *Ironbound Voices*, titled “Runaway Shops-Heartache for Workers and Profits for Corporations.” The prescient paper argued that it was not an inability to cover costs, but the search for higher profits and less unions that would lead companies overseas or to the south.⁷⁰ In 1980, Newark’s Westinghouse Manufacturing plant laid off 1,000 employees before abandoning the city for Florida, five years before Ideal Toy.

The closing of Ideal Toy even had the potential to cause a ripple effect on the state of New Jersey, sending the state government scrambling to keep others from closing in response. Reporting on the State Assembly’s passage of a plant and job retention bill, the *Newark Star-Ledger* noted that Ideal Toy closed just one day before the vote. Democrats pointed to the factory as a clear example of why the bill should pass, but the debate remained contentious.⁷¹ Pro-business lobbyists were so incensed with the proposal to mandate pre-notification of factory closings that the Assembly Speaker removed them from the chamber, as “both tension and noise level reached a fever pitch.”⁷² The bill was written not to plead with companies to stay in the state, but to mitigate the effects of mass layoffs once they were gone.

In all, Ideal Toy was more than just the magic-making place where Americans watched

⁶⁸ Scott Muldoon, “CBS Toy Winds Down Vast Newark Operation,” 24.

⁶⁹ Scott Muldoon, “CBS Toy Winds Down Vast Newark Operation,” 24.

⁷⁰ “Runaway Workers-Heartache for Workers and Profits for Corporations,” *Ironbound Voices*, (April, 1980), <https://archive.org/details/IronboundVoices198004a/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>

⁷¹ Donald Warshaw, “Legislators Clear Restrictions on Plant Closings,” *Newark Star-Ledger*, June 28, 1985, 1.

⁷² Donald Warshaw, “Legislators Clear Restrictions on Plant Closings,” 1.

their Rubik's Cube gain its trademark squares or the smile get sewn on their beloved teddy bears. It was an idea, a hope for a better tomorrow in a place devastated by the loss of an iconic brewery and employer. It was also a battleground, where picketers marched for their jobs and Ironbound's greatest offered their time and resources to support them through theater and film. Newark has since shifted gears with the start of the 21st century, now investing in the arts with the construction of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and entertainment with the opening of the Prudential Center. Even so, further research on Newark's late factories like Ideal Toy may offer a new perspective on what the city of Newark can choose to be. If anything, it has already proven that against the odds, the work of its people to have a say in that rebirth has already begun.

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