

WOMEN'S WORK AND POLITICS IN WWI AMERICA

*The Munsingwear Family
of Minneapolis*

LARS OLSSON



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“CAMP MUNSINGWEAR” AT WAR

When the employees of the Northwestern Knitting Company in Minneapolis received the 1917 May volume of the monthly company magazine, the *Munsingwear News*, they were met by the Star-Spangled Banner on the front page. It was framed by President Wilson’s “Message to Congress,” where he asked for a “Declaration of State of War with the Imperial German Government.” The President assured that the United States’ motive for entering the war in Europe was not revenge “but only the vindication of right, of human right” and that the United States was “only a single champion.”¹

The president of the Northwestern Knitting Company, Frederick M. Stowell, took for granted that “every employee of this Company has read and read carefully and thoughtfully President Wilson’s appeal [...].” In fact, he expected the employees at the company, whatever national background they had, to stand up for the United States at war:

I have not the slightest doubt of the loyalty of every one of you to this Country—your Country and mine. You have been so thoroughly loyal and faithful to this Company and have shown it so consistently that the spirit of loyalty has become a part of you, one of your natural attributes, and such being the case, I know that this same feeling must prevail in you as regards

¹ *Munsingwear News*, May 1917, p. 2.

to your Country. I feel confident that no matter what part of the world may have been your birthplace that you will and do fully appreciate that this Country is now *your* home, and as such deserves and will have your undivided, loyal support. (*italics in original*)²

Stowell, thus, tried to connect the imagined community of “the Munsingwear Family” with their likewise presumed imagined community of “the American Nation” at war. He assured the “Munsingites”—the nickname of the employees of the Northwestern Knitting Company—that he spoke to them “as representatives by *birth* of nearly all the nations of the world, but *today* as true, loyal, faithful, free Americans.”

Stowell also gave substance to the connection between the Company and the Nation by expecting every loyal “American” employee of the company to work harder than ever:

We can all “do our bit” by doing the thing we have been doing and are qualified to do, but we must do it better—do it more efficiently—do more of it—put our whole souls into our work, with the thought always in mind that in doing so we are contributing to the welfare of our Country, the perpetuation of its institutions, the security of its (our) homes.

Since the company had a state contract to make underwear—Munsing Wear—for the soldiers at war, the directors and the employees could claim that they not only contributed to the welfare of the Nation but also made a considerable contribution to the war efforts, although garment work is not normally included when women’s work in wartime is highlighted.³ Indeed, this involvement in the war production was deeply imprinted in employees of the company. Alice Larson, for instance, told descendants of hers that she was paid by the government when she knitted fabric for army underwear during the war. Alice, aged 20 in 1918, worked carefully and kept her machine running all the time. She reminded herself that she made really good productivity at work.⁴ She did her bit for the war effort.

² *Munsingwear News*, May 1917, p. 5.

³ See for instance Maurine W. Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women’s Work in the United States*, Westport, 1980, pp. 21ff.

⁴ Oral information to author.

Certainly, company president Stowell included himself and the other directors among those who should do their bit, but the workers could not miss his appeal for more efficiency at work on their part. The directors introduced “scientific management” at the plant and asked for a great deal of self-sacrifice by the employees as part of their contributions to the war effort. Certainly, he did not tell the employees about the large company profits and the dividends to the stockholders. The Northwestern Knitting Company could do “business as usual” during wartime; in fact, it did better business than before. In his concluding report for the fiscal year 1917, Stowell told the stockholders that the company “in addition to our regular business, furnished our Government, for use in the army of the United States, many thousands of pieces of underwear.”⁵ The editor of the *Munsingwear News* added that “[b]usiness from both old and new accounts [was] being booked in a highly satisfactory manner,” so there was “no gloom in *Camp Munsingwear* over reports coming in from the front line (my italics).”⁶ The Northwestern Knitting Company was part of the US home front, partly by contributing to the economic war effort, and partly by making all employees into loyal Americans in support of the war. In this book I will explore those two intertwined processes.

“... THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRY IS GROWING GREATER EVERY DAY”

When the United States entered the war in Europe, women’s gainful employment outside their homes was put on the political agenda, because a lot of women replaced men who were drafted for war. Some of them were exploited in a way that went beyond what was acceptable for public opinion. In a report by the Women in Industry Committee of the Bureau of Women and Children at the Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries in December 1917, its chairwoman, Miss Agnes Peterson,⁷ claimed that “the problem of women in industry” was

⁵Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910–July 1919, p. 198. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁶*Munsingwear News*, May 1919, p. 6.

⁷On Agnes Peterson, see Mary Anderson, *Woman at Work: The Autobiography of Mary Anderson as Told to Mary N. Winslow*, Minneapolis, 1951, pp. 110, 215–216. Agnes Peterson was born of Swedish immigrants in St. Peter, Minnesota. She was director of the Bureau of Women and Children at the Minnesota Department of Labor, 1911–1918, and

“growing greater every day.”⁸ In March 1918, the committee started a survey of wage-earning women in Minnesota that had “a double object in view.” First, it should “obtain accurate data about the growing number of women wage earners and the conditions under which they worked and lived.” Second, it desired that the data “could be used in the shaping of a constructive policy for the protection of women wage earners.”⁹

Altogether, the committee collected information on more than 51,000 female workers in Minnesota; a full third of them worked in manufacturing.¹⁰ Information on every single woman was collected regarding name of firm, name of employee, home address, age, country of birth, nationality, kind of work, wages per week, whether the women were living at home or not, whether they contributed to family support or not, marital status, if their husband or son(s) were in army or navy, their husband’s present employment and wages per week, and the age of any children they might have.¹¹

There was a wide variety in earnings, but no fewer than 35% of the women earned less than \$10 per week, and the committee considered it to be a “remarkable fact” that one-third of the wage-earning women in Minnesota did not earn “a minimum subsistence wage.” Another third earned enough to live on that level but no more, so the committee concluded that more than 70% of gainfully employed women “received sufficient wages for only a bare existence or less.” Notwithstanding, more than 28,000 wage-earning women—single and married, widows and divorced, deserted or separated—had family obligations and contributed to the support of their families. The survey included 3779 mothers with 7206 children below laboring age. More than half of the women who

she was active in the “framing and enactment of legislation; investigation of conditions of employment and enforcing of laws affecting women and children.” Later she became assistant director of the Woman’s Bureau at the United States Department of Labor, where she served as industrial supervisor 1918–1921. She was a member of the National Women’s Trade Union League and many other associations. See *Who’s Who: Minnesota Women*, 1924.

⁸Women’s Committee, Correspondence and Subject Files, Women in Industry. Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Location 103.K.7.13B, MHC.

⁹ *Women in Industry in Minnesota in 1918*, Minneapolis, 1920, pp. 3f.

¹⁰ *Women in Industry in Minnesota in 1918*, p. 6.

¹¹ *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Women’s Committee. Women in Industry Survey Forms, 1918–1919*. Microfilm SAM 222, MHS.

earned less than \$10 per week contributed to the family economy, so although they generally were not primary breadwinners, the committee concluded that it was “hardly possible to excuse low wages for women workers on the ground that they [had] no family responsibility.”¹²

In Minneapolis alone, 3100 industrial workplaces were surveyed, covering 19,128 wage-earning women.¹³ The majority of the workplaces were concentrated in the Central District, where close to 82% of the women were gainfully employed.¹⁴ Since there were several ethnic clusters in the city, female workers were often included in national communities rather than working class communities.¹⁵

THE NORTHWESTERN KNITTING COMPANY

The largest workplace for gainfully employed women in Minnesota was the Northwestern Knitting Company, where no fewer than 2687 women of 30 nationalities were registered as being in gainful employment in 1918; they made up one out of eight wage-earning women in Minneapolis. Most of them were blue-collar workers, but several were white-collar workers. More than half of them were immigrants or daughters of immigrants from Europe; 465 of them—18% of the total—had immigrated themselves, mostly from Sweden and Norway but also from Finland, Austria, and “Poland.”¹⁶ Only 50 of them had been naturalized as Americans, so 415 women at the company were born in Europe and identified themselves with their country or national group of origin.

¹² *Women in Industry in Minnesota in 1918*, pp. 7–12 and 35.

¹³ Reports of Work May–July 1918 and Bulletin August–October 1918, Minnesota Women’s Committee, Council of National Defense and Commission of Public Safety, Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Main files, Location 103.L.7.6F Box 3, F 56. MHS.

¹⁴ May Rogers Lane, *Women and Girls Employed Outside of the Home*, p. 79, Survey 1919, Vol. 2, Special Studies, Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota. Another 3000 women worked, according to Miss Lane, as teachers, nurses, physicians, and employees in public service.

¹⁵ June Drenning Holmquist (ed.), *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups*, St. Paul, 1981.

¹⁶ Finland was established as an independent state in December 1917, and Poland was re-established as a state after the war, so in 1918 the Polish women were still subjects of Germany, Austria, or Russia.

Some 910 women—35% of the total—were born in the United States but claimed that they belonged to another nationality than American and were registered by their nationality of family origin. Most of them claimed Swedish, German, and Norwegian nationality, but several others claimed French, Irish, and Polish nationality.

The other 1236 women at work at the company, a good 47% of the total, were born in the United States, identified themselves as Americans, and claimed American citizenship. Certainly, several of them, for instance Alice Larson (above p. 6), had their national origin in Europe two, three, or more generations back in time; such a national affiliation is indicated only by their names or by family histories. So, there was a large variety of nationalities among the women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Since 30 nationalities were represented, the company management was highly involved in the Americanization program that aimed at making every inhabitant of Minnesota into “Americans,” who were loyal to the Nation and to the United States’ involvement in the war in Europe (Fig. 1.1).

Considering that the Northwestern Knitting Company was the largest workplace for gainfully employed women in Minnesota and the largest garment factory in the United States, it is quite remarkable that no historian has paid any attention to it. In her contemporary study of the metropolitan market in the Twin Cities, Mildred Hartsough had nothing to say about the garment giant of the city.¹⁷ Kirk Jeffrey, in his article on “the major manufacturers” in Minnesota, has nothing more to say than that the company “was the world’s leading manufacturer of underwear,”¹⁸ while other factories are discussed in more detail. Notably, both Hartsough and former Northwestern Knitting Company employee Clarence Tolg¹⁹ presented the picture of a totally male industrial Minneapolis. Nor did Charles Rumford Walker notice any women at work in his famous book, *American City* (1934). Elizabeth Faue

¹⁷Mildred L. Hartsough, *The Development of the Twin Cities as a Metropolitan Market*, Minneapolis, 1925, pp. 51, 54.

¹⁸Kirk Jeffrey, “The Major Manufacturers: From Food and Forest Products to High Technology,” in Clifford E. Clark (ed.), *Minnesota in a Century of Change: The State and Its People Since 1900*, St. Paul, 1989, p. 231. In her book *In the Mood for Munsingwear: Minnesota’s Claim to Underwear Fame*, St. Paul, 2011, Susan Marks focuses on the garments.

¹⁹Clarence Tolg, *Minneapolis: The Market of the Northwest*, Minneapolis, 1923.



Fig. 1.1 The Home of the Big Munsingwear Family. Munsingwear News. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

concludes in her pioneering study of women and men in the labor movement that Minneapolis was “a city of men.”²⁰ In her book on undercover journalist and labor activist Eva McDonald-Valesh, however, Faue highlights women’s work in Minneapolis around 1890 and, especially a working class woman’s labor activism.²¹ The only research available on the Northwestern Knitting Company of the 1910s is a student paper by Terry Swanson, who exploits the survey of 1918 and bits of the company records.²²

There are three, partly intertwined aims in this study. The first aim is to provide an analysis of labor relations at the Northwestern Knitting Company, which by January 1, 1919 had become the Munsingwear Inc.²³ There is a focus on women’s work, but the analysis will focus on the interplay of class, gender, and ethnicity/race and the introduction of scientific management at work. The directors will be studied as part of the ruling Anglo-American bourgeoisie of Minneapolis, while the gainfully employed women are analyzed as part of the diversified, gendered, and multi-ethnic working class. Not only are blue-collar workers targeted but also white-collar workers, their work, and labor relations in the offices, because expanding administration was part of the developing industrial capitalism. The women’s gainful employment will be put into the sociopolitical context that had such an impact on everyone in the Twin Cities and in Minnesota.

The second aim is to analyze the paternal strategies of the company management to make the employees work harder and to be loyal to the company as members of “the Munsingwear Family.” Bonus programs, leisure time activities, and the introduction of industrial welfare programs are analyzed as anti-union strategies by the company directors, and the role of progressive movements as a class-bridging body will also be examined.

²⁰Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915–1945*, Chapel Hill, 1991, p. 1.

²¹Elizabeth Faue, *Writing the Wrongs. Eva Valesh and the Rise of Labor Journalism*. Ithaca 2002. Eva McDonald was married to Frank Valesh in 1891.

²²Terry Swanson, “The Munsingwear Family: Women at Work in the Factory—A Unique Perspective,” unpublished paper. History 8347, University of Minnesota, 1996.

²³The new name was resolved at a special stockholders’ meeting on December 18, 1918. Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Record Book December 1919–December 1925, p. 4, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

THE MINNESOTA WATCHDOG OF LOYALTY AND ITS WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

There was certainly no consensus in the United States on the declaration of war on Germany, especially not in Minnesota, where German and Scandinavian immigrants and their offspring made up a large part of the population. Several German-Americans and Scandinavian-Americans pleaded forcefully for US neutrality, and the entry of the United States into the war broke the historical consensus on inter-ethnic relations in Minnesota.²⁴

Class mattered too in regard to US neutrality and the “100 percent Americanism” issue. The National Security League was established in 1914 by “men associated with the nation’s leading banking and commercial houses” and worked for a tougher foreign policy on Germany. It was deeply engaged in the Americanization of immigrants and in the defense of the ruling social order in the United States.²⁵ Its policy spread over the country “as a class phenomenon, touching everywhere those upper-class elements in each section who identified themselves with this Eastern ruling group.” In 1915, a branch was established in Minneapolis, headed by the president of the Northwestern National Bank. It received a “warm welcome” from business leaders of the city, while organized labor opposed the anti-German offensive right up until April 6, 1917.²⁶

Even before the entry of the United States into the war, organized capital and the bourgeoisie attacked organized labor in Minnesota for being disloyal to “100 percent Americanism.”²⁷ This anti-labor movement was supported by individuals from immigrant communities, who approved of the social order in Minnesota.²⁸ Several company directors and bourgeois politicians exploited ethnic loyalty for the purpose of their class interests by connecting protests against the social order with

²⁴Chrislock, 1991, pp. 18ff.

²⁵David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, New York and Oxford 1980, passim but especially pp. 31, 36, 54, and 67.

²⁶Chrislock, 1991, pp. 22–23.

²⁷Chrislock, 1991, pp. 40 and 21.

²⁸Jimmy Engren, *Railroading and Labor Migration: Class and Ethnicity in Expanding Capitalism in Northern Minnesota, the 1880s to the mid 1920s*, Växjö, 2007, especially Chapter 10.

disloyalty to the idea of “100 percent Americanism” and the war on Germany. The Minneapolis Loyalty League, established under the auspices of the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association a few days before a large anti-war rally at the Minneapolis Auditorium on February 10, 1917,²⁹ became the official “non-political” organization to support the aggressive anti-labor and anti-German politics of the American establishment. It was headed by the aged president emeritus of the University of Minnesota and supported by the incumbent president of the university and the influential Catholic archbishop. Thus, American institutions and English-speaking intellectuals were front figures of the League, but economically it was financed by the aggressively anti-unionist Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association.³⁰ Ten days after the United States’ entry into the war, these economic, social, and ideological forces received crucial political support.

On April 17, the Minnesota legislature enforced by law the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety (MCPS), which served as a most powerful body in Minnesota until its resignation in 1920. Governor Joseph Burnquist, of Swedish origin, appointed both Republicans and Democrats to serve on the commission, and both “old stock Americans” and members of immigrant communities were represented. Radical farmers of the Nonpartisan League and organized labor, on the other hand, were excluded, because they opposed the entry of the United States into the war and their rank-and-file members “perceived a lack of enthusiasm for the war” even after April 6, 1917. So, the commission, ruled by the anti-labor corporation attorney John F. McGee of Minneapolis, grasped the opportunity “to impeach the loyalty of its domestic enemies and to identify defense of the existing order with patriotic obligations.”

The commission put more energy into “defending the existing socioeconomic order against a rising tide of radicalism than anything else.”³¹

Supported by “banking, grain and milling circles,” McGee declared:

²⁹Chrislock, 1991, p. 41f.

³⁰Gieske, Millard L., *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third Party Alternative*, Minneapolis 1979, p. 23.

³¹William Millikan, “Defenders of Business: The Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association Versus Labor During W.W.I,” *Minnesota History*, Spring 1986, Vol. 50: 1, p. 5. Chrislock, 1991, pp. Xf, 21, 77, and 86; William Millikan, *A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903–1947*, St. Paul, 2001, pp. 102ff; Engren, 2007, ch. 10.

It is a most drastic bill and when it goes into effect, if the Governor appoints men who have backbone, treason will not be talked on the streets of this city and the street corner orators, who denounce the government, advocate revolution, denounce the army and advise against enlistments, will be looking through the barbed fences of an interment [*sic*] camp out on the prairie somewhere.³²

Governor Burnquist fulfilled the dreams of these business interests. Indeed, John McGee had a “backbone.” He decided “to suppress not only out-and-out pro-Germans but also trade unionists (whether moderate or radical), members of the Nonpartisan League, Socialists, pacifists, and all who entertained the slightest doubt with respect to the wisdom of America going to war.”³³ The MCPS established an image of itself as “the scourge of anyone remotely suspected of being soft on the war, socialistically inclined, or infected with pacifism.”³⁴ Its ambition was to endow the state government with “sufficient power to act forcefully against threats to social stability and property.” Millikan even considers “the Watchdog of Loyalty”—as Carl Chrislock named it—“a dictatorial group” that governed Minnesota until 1920.³⁵

Certainly, the MCPS also targeted immigrants in Minnesota, since “their loyalty” could not in general be trusted by the pro-war forces. It was mandated to put “aliens under strict surveillance” at any cost, and in late 1917 and early 1918 it made a total registration of a quarter of a million immigrants who had not been naturalized. This “loyalty crusade” represented a dramatic change in Minnesota politics, since immigrants for decades “had been solicited and welcomed as immigrants” but now “were singled out for suspicion.” In its final report, the MCPS concluded that the survey probably did “more than any law or measure previously adopted in Minnesota to bring foreign-born civic slackers [...] within the full sway of our laws and the American spirit; to make them realize their duties and appreciate their high privileges as Americans.”³⁶

The MCPS was not only a class and an ethnically biased institution but also a gendered one. Only men ruled Minnesota, but they

³²Quotation from Chrislock, 1991, pp. 55f.; and Millikan, 1986, p. 6.

³³Nord, 1986, p. 146; Chrislock, p. 77.

³⁴Chrislock, 1991, pp. ix.

³⁵Millikan, 1986, p. 5.

³⁶Gieske, 1979, p. 25; Chrislock, 1991, p. 59, 277. Quotation in Chrislock, p. 277.

considered women to be of great importance to the war effort. On May 21, 1917, the Women's Auxiliary Committee of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety was established under the leadership of Mrs. Alice Ames Winter, who also served as chairwoman of the Minnesota Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense; the two organizations overlapped as the Women's Committee.

Mrs. Winter was the half-sister of Charles W. Ames, one of the members of the MCPS, and wife of grain dealer Thomas G. Winter, who served as superintendent of the intelligence bureau of the MCPS. She included "well-known equal suffrage and social justice advocates" like Agnes Peterson, superintendent of the Bureau of Women and Children at the Bureau of Labor, as well as "middle-class" women of the ethnic communities in her network. But, like the MCPS, she did not approach the Nonpartisan League or organized labor.³⁷ The basic idea of women's war efforts was rather to develop gendered, class-crossing activities under American hegemony without including working-class women or female representatives of the Nonpartisan League or organized labor. So, a gender-biased class perspective was present in the involvement of women's work in the political economy of Minnesota at war.

The Women's Committee was less inclined to repressive measures than the MCPS. Instead, "Americanization work and patriotic propaganda" should, according to Mrs. Winter, be "the fundamental work and those on which all others depend[ed]." It aimed at making all inhabitants into "true Americans," a concept that wasn't really defined more precisely than that such Americans should speak English and should not "doubt the redemptive role of the United States in the world," especially its participation in "the Great War." Nor should "true Americans" in any way support the Nonpartisan League, organized labor, or other critics of the war efforts or the social order in Minnesota.³⁸

In Minneapolis, a local women's committee was already working by the fall of 1917 "to secure voluntary teachers of English, to solicit the cooperation of employers in the development of Americanization programs, and to disseminate publicity on behalf of these programs." Celebration of "newly-made citizens" was a symbolic action of importance, but "evangelizing the upcoming generation" was more important

³⁷ Chrislock, 1991, pp. 107f, 227 and 229ff.

³⁸ Chrislock, 1991, pp. 234f and 243.

than anything else. American women considered it to be of crucial importance to incorporate immigrant women and their children who did not speak English into the Nation.³⁹

Mrs. Winter officially proclaimed that “The protection of women in industry and child welfare [... was] vital to the well-being of our country.” Her traditional gender-biased view on “motherhood” was, however, challenged by federal directives to mobilize women for industrial work, when men were drafted for war and when much more Munsing Wear had to be made for the soldiers. The Women’s Committee did not only accept women’s work outside their homes but also encouraged women, except mothers of young children, to work whenever and wherever their labor was demanded. In no sense, though, was the program of the Women’s Committee a radical program for gender equality at work. It was similar to what “affluent, upper-class progressives” had supported during the previous two decades, because it did not demand equal payment for the same work for women and men, which the National War Labor Board and the Minnesota Federation of Labor demanded. Nor did the committee demand minimum wage legislation, which other women’s organizations asked for (see Chapter 2). Instead, Chrislock concludes, “the Winter program posed no threat to the groups whose interests were being so zealously guarded by the safety commission.”⁴⁰ The Women’s Committee just wanted women of different ethnic backgrounds to stand up for a Nation at war that encouraged the Anglo-American dominance, the social order of capitalism, and the bourgeois society.

As highlighted above, private business was deeply involved in the anti-German and anti-labor politics of the MCPS and its Women’s Committee. The directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company participated eagerly. The third aim of this study, thus, is to analyze how the company directors acted to make immigrant workers into “true Americans” and in making all employees—regardless of national background—loyal to the United States’ war on Germany. Altogether, the study is an effort to entwine corporate, labor, gender, political, technological, and welfare history at a turbulent period of Minnesota history when the US government involved the Nation in “the Great War” on Germany.

³⁹Chrislock, 1991, pp. 234f.

⁴⁰Chrislock, 1991, pp. 236f and 247.

SOURCES

Most sources for this study are housed in the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) in St. Paul. One of them is the extraordinarily rich and standardized quantitative material that was collected by the Women's Committee of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety and the Bureau of Women and Children of the Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries, presented in the introduction. I have also made extensive use of the correspondence and other papers of the Women's Committee. I have scrutinized the records of the MCPS as a whole. In particular, I found some information on all men in the employ of the company who had been drafted for war in June 1917, and the company directors' efforts to have them exempted from the draft.⁴¹

Further, a report from the Munsingwear Inc. to the Minimum Wage Commission of the Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries in 1920 has been of great value. It includes complete information on the names of the employees, classification of work, hours worked, and earnings for two fortnights in June.⁴² As far as I know, this information from roughly 2500 employers has not been exploited before by scholars of Minnesota labor or business history.

There is an inspection report of great interest on the plant in the records of the Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries. The report is undated, but it is included in a series of inspections of industrial plants in 1917–1922. As all companies in Minneapolis were inspected at the same time, and as the total number of workers at Northwestern Knitting Company was noted as 3084 with women workers numbering 2544, the inspection might even have been done as part of the survey by the Women's Committee in 1918. I have scrutinized all the relevant records of the State Department of Labor and Industries.

The social conditions of working women can also be analyzed from a survey that the Minneapolis branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) carried out in 1919. Its papers are housed in the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota.

⁴¹ *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Papers*, Main files, Box 7, F 97, Location 103.L.8.1B, MHS.

⁴² The collection of the wage information was initiated by Mary Anderson, director of the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. *Second Biennial Report of the Minimum Wage Commission*, April 1, 1918–January 15, 1921, p. 9.

The YWCA intended to “ascertain the needs of young women and girls along the lines of religious instruction; physical, academic, and vocational education; boarding and rooming places; and the finding of proper employment.”⁴³ Further, I consulted the records of the Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, which are housed in the Minnesota Historical Society.

The records of the Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Inc. in the Minnesota Historical Society are rather rich for the period that is the focus of this study. I use the minutes of the company board as well as those of the directors’ meetings and the annual meetings of the stockholders in the 1910s. The interests of the directors were discussed and formulated indiscreetly, not only at private meetings but in the minutes of board meetings as well, and therefore, by analyzing the minutes of the board of directors we can get some understanding of their labor strategies. Parts of these strategies can also be identified through an analysis of the company magazine *Munsingwear News*, which was published monthly and given free of charge to every employee of the company between 1916 and 1921. There are copies of several volumes in the Munsingwear archives, although mostly after 1917. The booklet *The Success of Well Doing* was published in 1921 “in lieu of” one of the regular copies of the *Munsingwear News*, especially for “newcomers and prospective Munsingites,” by whom the editor meant “those who have recently joined, and those who contemplate[d joining] that friendly group of workers—The Munsingwear Family.”⁴⁴ The annalist wrote the booklet on behalf of the company directors and its aim was to give a positive and optimistic impression of the company. It is certainly biased, but it contains valuable information on several tasks as well as the ideology of the company managers at the time. Unfortunately, the annalist said nothing about work in the many offices. Some information on office workers can, however, be found in the *Munsingwear News*.

A large and very rich collection of photographs from the company at the Minnesota Historical Society gives valuable information on the work and on labor relations. Several photos of the interior of the plant

⁴³ *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association*, Records, Box 10, Survey 1919, Vol. 1 “Summary of the findings of the survey,” The Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴⁴ *The Success of Well Doing*, Minneapolis, 1921, *Munsingwear Inc.*, Records, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9B, MHS.

were published in the *Munsingwear News* and in the booklet, and these are likewise valuable for the analysis of the work organization and labor relations.

Nowadays, the photos are available on the Internet: <http://collections.nmhs.org.visualresources>.

Unfortunately, there is only one interview in the great Oral History Collection at the Minnesota Historical Society that concerns this project. The labor activist Myrtle Harris “was sewing for Munsingwear” during the second half of the 1910s. The interview does not contain much information on the company other than that it was a “non-union shop.”⁴⁵ Nor are there any oral histories on the Northwestern Knitting Company in the large collection of interviews with, primarily, immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe at the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. I did, however, get some oral information from a descendant of Alice Larson, later married Johnson, who worked at the Northwestern Knitting Company during the war.

Lastly, local newspapers have also been utilized.

⁴⁵ *Oral History Project*, 1975: Myrtle Harris, MHS.



CHAPTER 2

The Political Economy of Minneapolis

AN INDUSTRIAL CENTER OF THE MIDWEST

“Seventy-five years ago Minneapolis was a village of a dozen shacks near the Falls of St. Anthony,” said Charles Rumford Walker in his famous book *American City*.¹ Only a handful of commercial enterprises were established in the late 1830s, and the first sawmill opened at “the largest water power site west of Niagara” in St. Anthony in 1848.²

The city, though, changed quickly within the next few years and “achieved ‘civilization’ in a little more than forty [years].”³ After the 1880s, Minneapolis and her twin sister city St. Paul grew dramatically in importance. While St. Paul developed into the political center of the region, Minneapolis outstripped the capital as a commercial and industrial center. Minneapolis developed into *the* market for grain, “which has flowed to her mills and elevators in ever increasing quantities.” Additionally, the lumber trade, agrarian products and agrarian implements were traded in Minneapolis in large quantities, and around 1920 she numbered fourth in the country in livestock trade.⁴

¹Charles Rumford Walker, *American City: A Rank and File History of Minneapolis*, Minneapolis, 2005 (1937), p. 5.

²Ronald Abler, John S. Adams, John R. Borchert, *St. Paul—Minneapolis: The Twin Cities*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 11.

³Walker, 2005, p. 9.

⁴Hartsough, 1925, pp. 51, 54.

In the 1880s, Minneapolis ranked as the leading flour milling center of the United States. For many years, no other single production line challenged flour milling as the main industrial branch in Minneapolis, but miscellaneous manufacturing developed vigorously, especially metal industries, such as foundries, shops for railroad machinery, agricultural implements, and mill machinery. The linseed oil industry too developed extensively, and in 1919 Minneapolis ranked first in the world in that sector. As already indicated, the garment industry was added to these mostly male industries.

Altogether, centralized in an area of 200 acres in the northeastern part of the city, Minneapolis was a large and important industrial center of the Midwest in the early 1900s. It had an effective infrastructure with railway and streetcar connections, serving communication between cities as well as within Minneapolis.⁵ She was “the railroad center of the Northwest,” and she served that territory through twenty-nine railroad lines, out of which nine were trunk lines “centering in the city.”⁶ Streetcar transportation peaked in 1920, when about 140 million passengers were transported.⁷

In the early days, all investors in Minnesota were men from New England, who entered into landowning, the lumber industry, railroad-ing, and the early banking houses. Later on, banking capital was also raised from local industrial businesses, and there was “a close affiliation between the bankers and millers.” Already in the early 1880s, wealthy and powerful men like J. S. Pillsbury and G. A. Pillsbury, W. D. Washburn, W. H. Dunwoody, O. C. Merriam, J. A. Christian, and Thomas Lowry personified that concentration of power. And profits in the Twin Cities area were considerable. By 1913, the Twin Cities’ industrial and banking capital had established itself as a “financial nucleus of the Northwest.” The First National Bank was established as “the largest national bank of the United States west of Chicago,” and only seven US cities had larger banking institutions.⁸ The highly concentrated Twin Cities banking capital gradually controlled more and more of the

⁵Hartsough, 1925, pp. 64–70. In 1922, there were 530 miles of track and 1021 street cars. See www.wapedia, Twin City Rapid Transit Company.

⁶Tolg, 1923, Introduction.

⁷Calvin F. Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities: An Ecological and Statistical Study of Social Trends in Minneapolis and St. Paul*, Minneapolis, 1937, p. 43.

⁸Hartsough, 1925, pp. 124ff.

economic life in the region. The Upper Midwest gradually loosened its bonds with the New England and Chicago capitalists.

But still in the late 1930s, Walker noticed that an overwhelming dominance over the economy of the city was exerted by Anglo-Americans of New England origin:

Today there are Olsons and Petersons and Andersons in Minnesota politics. But look over the names of the bankers, or railway directors, or the owners of the flour mills or timber lands. They are Walker, Weyerhauser, Pillsbury, Crosby, Bennet, Washburn. The Pillsburys came from New Hampshire, the Washburn and Crosbys from Maine; most of the “first families” came from New England, direct or via Ohio or Iowa. The rosters of Minneapolis and the Woodhill Country Club contain no Norse names. Didn’t the melting pot work in Minnesota, or hasn’t there been time yet for a vertical infiltration? The city is a split personality.⁹

Even if Walker included the Weyerhauser family in the Anglo-American bourgeoisie, class and ethnicity intersected—certainly on uneven and antagonistic terms—in the shaping of the financial and industrial center of the Midwest.

LABOR MIGRATION INTO MINNEAPOLIS

The dramatic expansion of industrial capitalism in the Twin Cities attracted many young men and women to “go west” for employment, as much as this migration was a precondition for that expansion.

Certainly, many European labor migrants were lured to the United States by steamship companies and other emigrant agencies, “America letters” from country(wo)men, and information from re-migrants. Once in the United States, many labor migrants came into the hands of labor agencies, which procured workers for industrial plants, domestic work, and other kinds of labor. In the Twin Cities, labor agencies were established to supply labor for all kinds of work.

In 1916, there were 30 labor agencies in Minneapolis, which offered industrial companies a variety of labor.¹⁰ Some specialized in women workers. In its survey of women’s work and living conditions in

⁹Walker, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁰Hartsough, 1925, p. 57.

Minneapolis in 1919, the Young Women's Christian Association identified 19 female employment agencies.¹¹ Others specialized in "foreign labor," while some specialized in labor within their own ethnic community. Swedish women and men, for instance, were provided by a Swedish labor agency, headed by Mrs. Lundqvist,¹² or by the Swedish Tabernacle Young Women's Employment Office.

Some "open shop" employers joined the Citizens Alliance (CA) to inform workers of opportunities, where unions were not welcomed. In 1919, the CA established the Free Employment Bureau that arranged labor free of charge for both employers and workers. The bureau made "personal files and employment indexes," in order to be able to "follow an employee from plant to plant and retain a record of his or her work." Union members were blacklisted.¹³ Walker was probably referring to the CA when concluding that "the employers of Minneapolis set up a special engine for breaking strikes and eliminating unions from the city's economic life." The CA organized "one of the most complete undercover spy systems in the United States," he argued, and it "fought every major strike in Minneapolis for thirty years."¹⁴

A few other companies—like the Northwestern Knitting Company—had their own bureaus in the plant in the late 1910s. Trade unions likewise set up their employment bureaus in order to establish a source of labor that would not cheat workers who sought employment but support them as well as get some control over the labor market. Likewise, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Union City Mission, the Women's Cooperative Alliance, and the Salvation Army engaged in labor relations, often combining labor exchange with lodging, reading rooms, and, when appropriate, religious meetings. In comparison with the private bureaus, however, all the others were of limited importance.¹⁵ Most of these "middlemen for the buyers and sellers of

¹¹List and schedules of Public and Social Agencies, p. 197. Survey 1919, Vol. 3, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association Archives*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota.

¹²Månsson, Evelina, *Amerikaminnen: Upplevelser och iakttagelser från en 6-årig vistelse i U.S.A.* Hvetlanda, 1930, p. 31.

¹³Millikan, 2001, pp. 163f.

¹⁴Walker, 2005, p. 34; Tolg, 1923, Introduction.

¹⁵William B. Taylor, *The Labor Market for the Northwest, A Study Based Chiefly upon the Records of Minneapolis Private Employment Agencies for the Period 1919 to 1922*, M.A. Thesis, 1923, University of Minnesota Archives, pp. 8, 17.

casual labor” were, of course, located “close to the source of supply,” i.e. the Central district of the city.¹⁶ In November 1917, six months after the entry of the United States into the war, the Woman’s Occupational Bureau opened for the purpose of serving as a clearing house of information between employers and trained women [...] and to direct untrained women to places where they might obtain training.”¹⁷

POPULATION, OCCUPATION, AND POLITICS IN MINNEAPOLIS UNTIL 1920

In 1920, there were a good 380,000 inhabitants in Minneapolis. No less than 77% of them were born in the United States, and 23% were European immigrants. Most of the Americans were born in the West North Central region, including Minnesota, but more than 50,000 were born in the East North Central region, including Chicago. About 20,000 Minneapolis inhabitants had their roots in the eastern states, and a few thousand in other parts of the nation.¹⁸ The number of African Americans rose from a good 1500 in 1900 to close to 4000 in 1920,¹⁹ comprising just one percent of the population. Additionally, there were fewer than a hundred Chicana/os,²⁰ and, officially, no more than 27 Native Americans in 1910.²¹

The European immigrants had their roots in several countries, but Scandinavians dominated and formed “a background for all other nationalities in the city constituting one third of the whole population of the city.”²² And, indeed, in 1920 Minneapolis housed nearly 15,000

¹⁶Taylor, 1923, p. 2.

¹⁷Correspondence and Subject Files, Women in Industry, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Women’s Committee, Location 103.K.7.13B, MHC.

¹⁸Population, general report and analytical tables, Table 25, p. 667. *Fourteenth Census of United States* taken in the year 1920. Reports. Vol. 2, Washington, 1922.

¹⁹Population, general report and analytical tables, Table 15, p. 54, *Fourteenth Census of the United States* taken in the year 1920, Vol. 2, Washington, 1922.

²⁰Susan M. Diebold, “*The Mexicans*,” in Holmquist (ed.), 1981.

²¹*Indian Population in the United States and Alaska*, 1910, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, 1915, Table 11, p. 27.

²²Distribution of Foreign Speaking Population, p. 104. Survey 1919, Vol. 2, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

Table 2.1 Foreign-born population in Minneapolis in 1920: Countries of birth. Numbers and percentages

<i>Country of birth</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>%</i>
Sweden	11,793	29.7	14,722	30.3
Norway	7899	19.9	8490	17.5
Canada	3642	9.2	3829	7.9
Germany	3042	7.7	3397	7.0
Russia w. Lithuania	2792	7.0	3616	7.4
Poland	2054	5.2	2735	5.6
England	1363	3.4	1601	3.3
Denmark	947	2.4	1584	3.3
Austria	960	2.4	1262	2.6
Ireland	1032	2.6	1034	2.1
Czechoslovakia	427	1.1	1086	2.2
Romania	713	1.8	771	1.6
Scotland	499	1.3	642	1.3
Finland	552	1.4	568	1.2
Greece	94	0.2	779	1.6
All others	1528	3.9	2480	5.1
Total	39652	99.2	48,596	100.0

Source United States Bureau of Census: Fourteenth Census. Reports. Vol. 2. Table 15, p. 746. My calculations

men and close to 12,000 women born in Sweden, while 8500 men and nearly 8000 women came from Norway (Table 2.1). The YWCA surveyor, however, estimated that there were about 60,000 inhabitants of Swedish origin, “forty to fifty thousand” of Norwegian and “from seven to twelve thousand” of Danish background. Canadian (mostly English-speaking), German, Russian, and Polish immigrants were registered in large numbers as well, while immigrants from England, Ireland, and Central Europe showed up only in limited numbers and southern and southeastern Europeans in even smaller groups. The surveyor estimated the Germans to be “at least twenty thousand” and the Poles to be “at least ten thousand,” of whom 60% had their background in the province of Galicia in Austria. She also claimed that there probably were between 17,000 and 18,000 Jews in the city and that 80% of them lived in “the so-called Ghetto.” Most of them originated from Russia or Lithuania.²³

²³Distribution of Foreign Speaking Population, pp. 100, 104 and 102. Survey 1919, Vol. 2, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

Several of the US-born men and women certainly had their historical roots in English-speaking Europe, so the British background of the migrants was more influential than indicated by the official statistics. French, Irish, and Swiss immigration is probably somewhat underestimated too, since immigration from those countries peaked long before 1890, and these immigrants were naturalized. Germans and Norwegians came a little later, and Danes and Swedes came in large numbers from the 1880s, Poles, Hungarians, Finns, and Greeks began to settle there in the late 1890s and in the first decade of the twentieth century. Italians did not arrive until the 1910s.²⁴ Of course, these different migration streams influenced the ethnic composition of Minneapolis in the 1910s, especially regarding the children and grandchildren of immigrants.

The ability to speak English differed considerably between ethnic groups. Most people who could speak English were to be found among the older immigrant groups, predominantly from Western and Northern Europe, whereas the more recently arrived immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe showed the highest proportion of people who did not speak English.²⁵

Like, for instance, Alice Larson from Upsala, Minnesota (above p. 6), many young men and women moved into Minneapolis from the Minnesota countryside as well. Several of them were the sons and daughters of farmers, who could not take over the farm. Elizabeth Faue claims that “the decline in the need for farm labor put young women on the road,”²⁶ and Joan M. Jensen supports that claim in her analysis of seven young “country daughters in the city,” who left their home farms in Wisconsin for work in the Twin Cities between 1910 and 1925. She adds that “[t]hese single country women were the majority of migrating workers in 1910. From childhood they were used to hard work and long working days, so they were well prepared for the same in an industrial setting.”²⁷ Faue also refers to a divorced mother who moved to the city, because “Minneapolis could at least offer her the possibility of employment in the garment trade.” Another woman “actively chose

²⁴June Drenning Holmquist (ed.), *They Choose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, St. Paul 1981.

²⁵Schmid, 1937, p. 137.

²⁶Faue, 1991, p. 23.

²⁷Joan M. Jensen, “Out of Wisconsin: Country Daughters in the City, 1910–1925,” in *Minnesota History* 59/2, Summer 2004, pp. 48f.

independence and freedom from farm life [and she] found work in the city as a waitress and later as a garment worker.”²⁸ Whether they came from the rural surroundings in Minnesota, from other states in the United States or from Europe, cumulatively in-migrants in Minneapolis made the working class of the city grow significantly.

Employment in the manufacturing and mechanical industry dominated among men all through the period 1880–1920, even though its percentage dropped from 44 to 40. Men’s employment in transportation and trade increased significantly, but the most significant increase in male employment happened in clerical work. For women, the most significant increase also happened within clerical occupations. In 1920, no less than 28% of all gainfully employed women worked in such occupations compared to 17% just 10 years earlier. Domestic and personal service dropped from 44% in 1900 to 24% in 1920. Strangely enough, the percentage of gainfully employed women in the manufacturing and mechanical industry fell from 29 to 19% in spite of the significant increase of women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company.²⁹

The survey of gainfully employed women in 1918 by the Women’s Committee highlighted women’s work in Minneapolis in more detail. Among those at work there were 366 “unskilled” workers, 410 domestic servants, 298 kitchen helpers, 525 waitresses, 472 washerwomen and laundresses, 220 cooks, 2540 machine operators, 521 seamstresses or otherwise working in non-industrial sewing, 332 printers and pressers, 424 packers, 1227 saleswomen, 1913 office assistants, 3285 stenographers, 1189 bookkeepers, 534 telephone operators, 1803 general office helpers, 370 cashiers, 557 foreladies, and 2537 factory workers.³⁰ Thus, somewhat astonishingly, stenographers made up the largest group of all, while a large number of women also worked as machine operators and factory workers. Other white-collar workers such as office assistants and offices helpers, bookkeepers, and saleswomen were registered in

²⁸Faue, 1991, p. 23.

²⁹*United States Department of Interior, Census Office, Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, June 1 1880*, Vol. 1, Table XXXVI, p. 887; *United States Bureau of Census, Twelfth Census 1900: Special Reports, Occupations* (Washington, 1904), Table 43, pp. 614–617; *Thirteenth Census 1910, Vol. IV, Occupation Statistics* (Washington, 1914), Table III, pp. 167ff.; *Fourteenth Census 1920* (Washington, 1922), Vol. IV, Table 16, pp. 169–185.

³⁰*Women in Industry in Minnesota in 1918*, pp. 14–24.

significant numbers. In other words, women were involved not only in producing goods but even more in the administration of production and in selling manufactured goods.

The many arrivals of different nationalities often had to accept what temporary housing they could get. In the lodging house district in Minneapolis alone there were six lodging houses around 1920, and the cheapest housing available cost 25–50 cents a night. There were 40 second- and third-class hotels for those who could afford between 50 cents and \$1.50 a night; and 38 rooming houses, i.e. hotels with fewer than 20 rooms. In total, there was a capacity of no less than 5525 beds in these categories.³¹

Certainly, Minneapolis was both ethnically and socially segregated. The YWCA survey of 1919 exposed a distinct social segregation of the city. The American bourgeoisie and some prosperous people of the first cohorts of older nineteenth-century immigrants lived on the outskirts of the city and in the Lake District. Working-class immigrants were concentrated in the southern parts of the North District, the Northeast District, and the Central District. The YWCA surveyors were more than upset by the living conditions and the moral standards in these districts. I will return to that survey in Chapter 7.

ORGANIZED LABOR IN MINNEAPOLIS

The breakthrough for organized labor happened in the late 1870s, when men in the building trades organized and affiliated with the Knights of Labor (KOL). Indeed, the KOL also had a “Women’s Assembly,” although many knights were dubious about women workers and female members. The KOL raised a Labor Temple in Minneapolis in 1887, and the trade unions expanded to be the backbone of organized labor in the Twin Cities. They founded the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly in 1883, later the Minneapolis Central Labor Union that joined the Minnesota State Federation of Labor in 1890, which was affiliated to the American Federation of Labor.³²

By April 1907, the labor movement started to publish the (Minneapolis) *Labor Review* as a “Weekly Magazine for Organized

³¹Taylor, 1923, p. 2.

³²George Lawson, *History of Labor in Minnesota*, St. Paul, 1955, pp. 5–12. Elizabeth Faue, 2002, p. 16.

Workers.” The editor proudly announced that it was “The Only Publication in Minnesota Owned and Controlled by organized labor.”³³

The *Labor Review* became an important vehicle for organized labor in Minneapolis. It made official the demands by organized labor in Minnesota for an eight-hour workday; the abolition of the contract system; a regulation of child labor; workmen’s compensation for work accidents, illness, and in employment; state insurance with a reimbursement “for loss of life and limb”; weekly payment of all employees and a proper system of mine and factory inspection. It also made demands of special interest for this study: minimum wages of \$6.00 a week and an eight-hour day for women. The federation demanded state ownership and control of railways, telegraphs, and telephones, and it wished to further workingmen’s education.³⁴ The Minnesota Federation of Labor demanded the creation of public and free employment bureaus all over the state,³⁵ and in 1913, the Legislature created the Federal Employment Bureau, supervised by the Industrial Commission of Minnesota. It had offices for unskilled labor all over the Twin Cities’ factory districts, special offices for skilled and clerical workers, and a special division for women.³⁶

In April 1914, there were 89 local unions in Minneapolis and 11 Twin Cities Joint Councils that were affiliated to the Federation. Altogether, they had 14,496 male members but just 265 females. The Garment Workers’ Union No. 27 ranked second regarding unionized women.³⁷ In 1916, Minneapolis housed 101 unions that were represented in the semi-monthly meetings of the Minneapolis Central Labor Union, where union concerns were discussed and political initiatives formulated.³⁸ On a more overarching level, labor politics was discussed and formulated at the annual conventions of the Minnesota State Federation of Labor.

³³ *Labor Review*. Vol. 1. No. 1. April 4, 1907, front page. Later called *Minneapolis Labor Review*.

³⁴ Lawson, 1955, pp. 18 and 20.

³⁵ Lawson, 1955, p. 165.

³⁶ Taylor, 1923, p. 9.

³⁷ *Union Labor Bulletin*, April 1915, p. 30. I will come back to the garment workers’ unions in Chapter 5.

³⁸ *Union Labor Bulletin*. Labor Day Edition 1916, p. 33.

For many years, organized labor in Minneapolis did not concern itself very much with women workers, although labor activist and journalist Eva McDonald raised her voice for them around 1890.³⁹ In 1888, Leonora Barry of the KOL assured in a report on women's work and wages that women workers in Minneapolis could be organized. The existence of a women's assembly of the KOL was evidence of "the clear brain and honest heart of its members," although "a great deal of work remained for the women of Minneapolis," she optimistically claimed.⁴⁰

Much later, George Lawson tried to explain why organized labor in Minneapolis hardly included any women in the 1910s. In a report to the convention in 1912, he claimed that "the average working woman recognized that her employment was but temporary," and when the female workers married, "which they hoped to do," they would be "out of the labor market."⁴¹ This is what scholars call "the marriage bar" that regulated the employment of women.⁴² The 1912 convention claimed that several employers, especially in the Twin Cities, did not hire married women nor did they keep women in employment after they married. But also the men of the unions hesitated about married women at work. "The unions of that day frowned upon women going into any industry outside of retail stores and restaurants," George Lawson, himself being a leading union activist of those days,⁴³ said and thereby expressed the gender bias of organized labor. Changed attitudes were, however, coming up, or, as Lawson put it, "in 1912 the Federation concerned itself with the imperative necessity of organizing women workers in industry."⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Lawson does not tell us what measures were taken.

The American Federation of Labor's (AFL) neglect of unskilled workers opened the way for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) to approach female workers in Minnesota and beyond. It definitely influenced Minneapolis and Minnesota during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The IWW, founded in Chicago in 1905, soon

³⁹Faue, 2002. *Passim*. Eva McDonald-Valesh left the Twin Cities in the mid-1890s to work nationwide for AFL president Samuel Gompers.

⁴⁰Carolyn Daniel McCreesh, *Women in the Campaign to Organize Garment Workers, 1880-1917*, New York and London, 1985, pp. 32f.

⁴¹Lawson, 1955, p. 115.

⁴²See for instance Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 8 and several others.

⁴³Lawson, 1955, Foreword.

⁴⁴Lawson, 1955, p. 115.

organized large numbers of workers in Minnesota.⁴⁵ In Minneapolis, they had their headquarters in one of the main working-class neighborhoods, fairly close to the industrial area of the city, where the Northwestern Knitting Company was housed. Peter Rachleff claims that the IWW most of all organized unskilled workers and “recent immigrants,” while women were mostly involved as supporters of strikers and protesters against employers and politicians in northern Minnesota.⁴⁶ I have found no evidence that the IWW approached the women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company. There is, for instance, no discussion at all in the magazine of the Swedish branch of the IWW, *Allarm*, between 1915 and 1918, while it approached the domestic workers of Minneapolis in several articles in 1917 and 1918 as exploited workers.⁴⁷ So, the IWW in Minnesota did not only approach women as supporters of men’s labor activism but also as female workers. They did, though, neglect the many women who earned their living by working for the Northwestern Knitting Company.

The Minnesota State Federation of Labor also engaged in the federal foreign policy, especially at its convention in July 1917, which might have been one of “the most [...] dramatic conventions” in its history. The convention report, distributed before the declaration of war in April, was characterized by anti-war attitudes. However, the executive committee presented at the convention a supplementary report that bore the imprint of the AFL support for the entry of the United States into the war. The committee tried to convince everyone at the convention that the sociopolitical principles that President Wilson declared publicly were identical to “the principles on which the trade union movement [was] founded.”⁴⁸

At the convention, though, those words of social peace were not at all totally agreed on, and the supplementary report was debated intensively.

⁴⁵Richard M. Velely, *Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy*, Chicago, 1989, p. 21.

⁴⁶Peter Rachleff, “Turning Points in the Labor Movement: Three Key Conflicts,” in Clifford E. Clark (ed.), *Minnesota in a Century of Change: The State and Its People Since 1900*, St. Paul, 1989, pp. 196 and 200.

⁴⁷See for instance the volumes of March and May 1917 and February 1918.

⁴⁸Lawson, 1955, pp. 33–35. See also David Paul Nord, “Hot-house Socialism: Minneapolis, 1910–1925,” in Donald T. Critchlow (ed.), *Socialism in the Heartland*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1986, pp. 144f.

“Some things were said that should not have been said,” Lawson concluded later. One-third of the union representatives voted against it, and “for the first time in the history of the Federation a number of delegates left the convention to hold a protest meeting.”⁴⁹ Some unions even left the Federation. Obviously, the entry of the United States into the war split the trade union movement in Minnesota, and its left wing was heavily attacked by the MCPS.⁵⁰

ORGANIZED CAPITAL IN MINNEAPOLIS

Already in 1855, some businessmen in Minneapolis came together as the Union Board of Trade to discuss economic and social questions. Another body of organized capital was formed in 1881, when flour millers and grain traders established the Chamber of Commerce. Neither of these bodies, however, developed into an organization for declining the demands of workers for better working conditions and higher wages. Employers did not develop a body to combat trade unions and labor protests until after the tough streetcar strike in 1889 and the formation of the State Eight Hour League and the Minnesota State Federation of Labor, when the streetcar baron, and later Northwestern Knitting Company manager, Thomas Lowry and another 300 employers established the Minneapolis Business Union in 1890.⁵¹

Two years later, employers organized the Minneapolis Commercial and Athletic Club, from 1901 the Minneapolis Commercial Club. The club had about 5000 members, from “giants” like the First and Security National Bank, the Pillsbury and the Dayton companies to family businesses, and it aimed at defending their interests against organized labor’s demands. In 1911, the Commercial Club merged with two small civic clubs into the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association, which,

⁴⁹Lawson, 1955, pp. 36 and 38.

⁵⁰For the split of organized labor in the US on the war issue, see Joseph McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912–1921*, Chapel Hill, 1997. The split was, however, part of a more general split of the international socialist labor movement in spring 1917 that preceded the Bolshevik revolution in Russia half a year later.

⁵¹Millikan, 2001, pp. 17ff.

according to William Millikan, “was determined to maintain its domination of the city’s labor force with whatever means were necessary.” They considered labor unions to be both “traitorous,” “un-American,” and “unconstitutional.”⁵²

After the large strikes of 1901–1903, employers also established the Citizens Alliance of Minneapolis, which developed into an aggressively anti-labor organization. From its inception in 1903, one of its main tasks was to “provide workers to replace union strikers.” The idea of organizing this stream of labor, however, was not realized until after the war. Its primary goal, though, was to achieve the ideal of the “open shop,” i.e. non-unionized workplaces.⁵³

Another body for attacks on organized labor was the Northern Information Bureau (NIB) that was established around 1901 by Luke W. Boyce, who was in the employ of the Northwestern Retail Lumbermen’s Association. In 1914–1915, his concern shifted to the growing influence of radical political groups, especially the IWW. Financially supported by “prominent Twin Cities firms,” the NIB infiltrated the radical groups successfully, and in 1916 Boyce delivered “a practically complete membership list of IWW members in Minnesota” to his commissioners.⁵⁴ In 1917, he was elected “a special investigator” for the MCPS. The Munsingwear Inc. was one of the companies that were informed by the NIB.⁵⁵ One agent reported in 1920:

During the past five years we have carried on this work largely in the interest of big Twin City corporations. Among them I might mention Mr. Rufus Rand of the Minneapolis Gas Light Company; Mr. A. F Pillsbury of the Pillsbury Flour Mill; Mr. W. C. Helm, Russell-Miller Milling Company [...] *Mr. Franklin Chatfield of Munsingwear Corporation*, and many other large industries. (my italics)⁵⁶

⁵² Millikan, 1986, p. 4f.

⁵³ Millikan, 1986, p. 4; Millikan, 2001, pp. 12ff, 24.

⁵⁴ Millikan, 2001, p. 97.

⁵⁵ Historical sketch of the archive index for *Northern Information Bureau, Records*, MHS. ALPHA.

⁵⁶ Letter of September 15, 1920, *Northern Information Bureau, Records*, Background materials, Location 143.B.15. B. Folder 1, MHS.

Boyce added that the State Department of Justice had received reports from the NIB “regularly” during “the past several years.”⁵⁷ Obviously, State and Capital cooperated to combat workers’ radicalism, and the NIB was the mediator between the two. As a result, Minneapolis acquired a national reputation among employers as an “open shop town,” and among organized labor as “one of the worst scab cities in the country.”⁵⁸ In 1924, the CA itself maintained that Minneapolis was “the most open-shop city” in the United States.⁵⁹ The anti-union and anti-Socialist aggression could, however, not totally overrun workers’ interests and demands.

LABOR POLITICS IN MINNESOTA 1887–1920

The Republican Party ruled the state for several decades, but in the 1890s several Minneapolis voters changed to populist preferences. The Scandinavians especially, but also German immigrants, supported third party progressive alternatives like the People’s Party, which was based on “a belief that eastern corporate interests exercised oppressive control over national politics and the American economy to the detriment of the Midwest.”⁶⁰ The People’s Party “called for tighter regulations of monopolies, laws limiting hours and working conditions of labor, strict grain storage laws, a prohibition of high rates of interest, and the state manufacture of twine.” The Republicans, though, took over several of these populist demands and implemented some of them.⁶¹

In 1910, the Socialist Party of America (SP), established in Chicago in 1901, challenged the Republican rule of the state. Socialist candidate Thomas Van Lear was close to winning the election for Mayor in 1910, and he was “narrowly” defeated again in 1912.⁶² The SP received substantial support in several Minneapolis working-class wards, and the

⁵⁷Letter of November 28, 1921, *Northern Information Bureau, Records*, Background materials, Location 143.B.15. B. Folder 1, MHS.

⁵⁸Walker, 2005, p. 34;

⁵⁹Millikan, 2001, p. 73. See also Lois Quam and Peter Rachleff, “Keeping Minneapolis an Open-Shop Town,” in *Minnesota History*, Vol. 50: 3 (1986), pp. 105ff.

⁶⁰Chrislock, 1991, p. 5.

⁶¹Michael Barone, *The Social Basis of Urban Politics: Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1890–1905*, unpublished paper, no year. Notebooks P 1661, pp. 8–12. MHS.

⁶²Nord, 1986, p. 134.

Socialists “were emerging as major players in the political process.” In 1916, Van Lear was elected mayor of Minneapolis “by a clear-cut majority” for 1917–1918.⁶³

Van Lear did not only stand up for the working class and the labor movement in the city but was also a symbol of the anti-war opinion until President Wilson declared war on Germany. The national flag was not only a symbol of the nation, he proclaimed, but also a symbol of the repression of organized labor. That standpoint was articulated by the labor movement on several occasions, for instance at the mass meeting in the Minneapolis Auditorium on February 10, 1917.⁶⁴

Trade unions backed Van Lear and identified with the SP around 1910. Both individual unions and the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly supported the SP and its front figure. The main reason, Nord claims, was that “the capitalists had begun to move the fight from the industrial to the political field, with the use of court injunctions and police departments to break strikes.” Trade unionists had especially hard experiences of the activities of the CA, and workers in Minneapolis,” Nord underlines, “did not have to study Marx to discover what appeared to be a capitalist ‘system’ and a polarized class struggle. He could read it in the streets.”⁶⁵

Politically, the entry of the United States into the war was a disaster for organized labor in Minnesota. Backed by big business, “the Watchdog of Loyalty” eliminated the *New Times*, the main SP newspaper in Minnesota.⁶⁶ Suddenly, the trade unions withdrew their support for the SP after the entry of the United States into the war. “Because of its anti-war stand, the SP had lost its job as the umbrella for labor, liberal, and radical interests in Minneapolis,” Nord concludes. Van Lear joined the Municipal Nonpartisan League, which the Minnesota Federation of Labor organized in February 1918 “to be the permanent political arm of the local labor movement.” It differed from the SP most of all in its pro-Wilsonian war policy. In 1919, it was reorganized as the Working People’s Nonpartisan Political League, but it was still based on Socialist ideas. Van Lear and other candidates gained broad electoral support in

⁶³Nord, 1986, p. 134; Chrislock, 1991, p. 15.

⁶⁴Chrislock, 1991, p. 40.

⁶⁵Nord, 1986, pp. 137f.

⁶⁶Millikan, 2001, pp. 115f.

working class wards in both 1918 and 1921, but the Minneapolis city council did not achieve a radical majority until 1923.⁶⁷

One of the major aims of organized labor in Minneapolis was to get politicians to set up protective labor laws, especially on working hours, child labor, and women's work. For this, they approached the labor authorities of the state that gradually developed after 1886.

The Minnesota Labor Statistics Bureau was established in 1887 "to protect the rights of working people through the administration and enforcement of laws, rules, regulations to foster safe and healthful working environments, to insure adequate compensation for work performed; to assist victims of occupational injury and illness; and to license and inspect establishments that use[d] boilers and steam equipment." In 1907, it was renamed the Labor, Industry and Commerce Bureau, and in 1913 it was upgraded into the Department of Labor and Industries, headed by a labor commissioner. It collected crucial information on labor conditions and labor relations, which was reported to the governor.⁶⁸ From 1911, the president of the Minnesota Federation of Labor represented organized labor in "legislative activities."⁶⁹ The department had a special Bureau of Women and Children, headed by Superintendent Agnes L. Peterson, who was called for federal work in 1918 and was succeeded by Louise E. Schulz.

Around 1910, there was a vigorous debate about labor legislation in Minnesota. Employers claimed that they "were paying more and more for an inefficient system that wasted funds on court litigation that exacerbated employer-employee relations." Moreover, they asserted that disfavored workers had a sensitive ear for union organizers. Certainly, trade unions and the Minnesota State Federation of Labor tried to protect workers by proposing both a workers' compensation law and a state insurance to compensate injuries at work.⁷⁰ They were successful.

The Legislature of Minnesota claimed that the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1913 represented "a radical departure from the employer's liability laws," according to which an employee, to be compensated by the employer due to an accident, had to prove that he did

⁶⁷Nord, 1986, pp. 149–152.

⁶⁸<http://www.doli.state.mn.us/History.asp>.

⁶⁹Lawson, 1955, p. 32.

⁷⁰Robert Asher, "The Origins of Workmen's Compensation in Minnesota", in *Minnesota History*, Vol. 44: 4 (1974), p. 144.

not himself cause the accident that disabled him. The new act implied that “a workman,” who was hurt at work, should be compensated “by his employer in a definite amount regardless of whose fault caused the action.” The law was not mandatory for the employer or an employee, but “all employers and employes [*sic*] who [did] not notify the labor commissioner to the contrary [were] presumed to have elected to abide by its provisions.” Workers’ compensation for injuries at work was limited to a maximum of \$10.00 and a minimum of \$6.00 per week, unless the wage was less than that. In those cases full compensation should be paid. Compensation for death at work was set between \$1800 and \$3000. Compensation for total disability ranged between \$2400 and \$4000, while temporary disability was to be compensated with 50% of the wages for each week after the second week of disablement, although not for more than 300 weeks.⁷¹

The Workmen’s Compensation Act also stated that the employer “must provide medical, surgical and hospital treatment for the first 90 days of disability, but not to exceed in cost \$100.00, unless the court finds it necessary to increase the amount to \$200.00.”⁷² Further, the act meant that an employer had to report to the labor commissioner on all accidents that disabled the employee for one week or more. Any employer who was responsible for compensation could buy insurance from an insurance company.⁷³ Moreover, the employer and an employee could agree to deduct a certain amount of money from the wage to provide “other and greater benefits,” such as compensation for accident, sickness, or old age insurance of benefits, i.e. “something that he [the employee] could not recover under the Workmen’s Compensation Act.” The premium could be withdrawn from the employee’s wage.⁷⁴

⁷¹Bulletin No. 6, August 1913, The Workman’s Compensation Act, pp. 4f., *The State of Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries*, Location HD8053.M6A2, No. 1–17, MHS.

⁷²Bulletin No. 7, September 1913, “Pointers” on the Workman’s Compensation Act, *The State of Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries*, p. 2, Location HD8053.M6A2, No. 1–17, MHS.

⁷³Bulletin No. 8, September 1913, Employers’ Reports Under Workman’s Compensation Act and Accident Report Law, p. 2, *The State of Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries*, Location HD8053.M6A2, No. 1–17, MHS.

⁷⁴Bulletin No. 9, June 1914, Opinions of Attorney General and the Department of Labor on Workmen’s Compensation Act, p. 11, *The State of Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries*, Location HD8053.M6A2, No. 1–17, MHS.

As we will see later, the management of the Northwestern Knitting Company practiced those possibilities.

Whether the 1913 Workmen's Compensation Act was a progressive one or not has been debated. Millikan concludes that "Minnesota passed into law one of the most conservative workers' compensation statutes in the country," and private business could continue to make profits out of insurance for employees.⁷⁵ Robert Asher notes that the Minnesota law was "a consensus reform" that was "on par with the weakest state compensation statutes in the United States."⁷⁶ Anyhow, it affected the Northwestern Knitting Company (Chapter 6).

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries also established some important labor laws on women's and children's industrial work. In 1913, the existing Laws Regulating the Employment of Children, Prescribing the Hours of Labor for Women in Minnesota were revised by the newly reorganized Labor Department. The new provisions were made official by a pamphlet, which had the purpose of acquainting "Employers of Labor" with the new laws that the Labor Department was to "strictly enforce."

It became unlawful for any employer to employ children under 14 years of age for work "at any time" in factories, mills, or workshops and others.⁷⁷ Likewise, it became unlawful for any employer in any business to employ children aged over 14 to under 16 years of age when public schools of the district were in session, unless an official—normally a superintendent of schools—permitted the child to work and the employer kept a list of all employed boys and girls of these ages and returned the work certificate for the child to the official who issued it on termination of the employment.

The certificate was supposed to include the child's birth certificate, and the child had to be examined by the officer before an employment certificate could be signed. Every child who wanted a certificate had to have completed his/her studies in the common schools of the district where the child resided or of an equivalent school. No employment certificate was to be signed for any child that was "not able to read and write simple sentences in the English language." Thus, children who

⁷⁵Millikan, 2001, pp. 45ff.

⁷⁶Asher, 1974, p. 153.

⁷⁷*Laws Regulating the Employment of Children, Prescribing the Hours of Labor for Women, Revised to 1913*, St. Paul, 1913, pp. 5–10.

only spoke their non-English native language were not allowed to contribute to the family economy until they knew some English. The superintendent of the schools had to deliver a monthly list of the children who received an employment certificate to the state commission of labor regarding the dates of issue and expiration of the certificate, the age and sex of the child, the name of the employer of each child, and "the nature of the occupation the child is permitted to engage in."

Regarding working hours, "No person under the age of 16 years should be employed, or suffered or permitted to work at any gainful occupation more than 48 hours in any one week, nor more than 8 hours in any one day, or before the hour of 7 o'clock in the morning or after the hour of 7 o'clock in the evening." Every employer had to make that information public in "a conspicuous place," where children were employed. Every employer who was found guilty of an offense against the laws was fined at least \$25 but no more than \$50. An employer who continued to employ a child in violation of the laws was fined extra for every day of violation. Also, any authorized person who consciously issued a false certificate was to be fined.

Children aged 14–16, however, were not permitted to perform just any task in any mill. For instance, they were not permitted to be employed at "sewing belts, in any capacity whatever." They were not permitted to "adjust any belt to any machinery." Nor were they allowed to "oil, or assist oiling, whipping or cleaning machinery [...], operate, or assist, in operating rolling mill machinery, punches or shearers [...], operate, or assist laundry machinery; [...] be employed in any capacity in preparing any composition in which dangerous or poisonous acids are used, [...] in any capacity whatever in operating, or assisting to operate any passenger or freight elevator."

The child labor laws were to be supervised by officials of the Department of Labor and Industries and the truant officers, who had to visit any factory, mill, workshop, mine, or mercantile establishment, and all other places where workers were employed and "ascertain whether any minors are employed contrary to the provisions of this act." The labor officials had to "report any cases of such illegal employment to the school superintendent or to the chairman of the school board or board of education and to the commissioner of labor of the state." Employers had to provide them with the employment certificates and lists that the law provided for. Whether an employer like the Northwestern Knitting Company respected the laws or not remains to be seen.

Regarding women's work in factories and mills, the labor laws of 1913 mandated that no woman was permitted to work "in any mechanical or manufacturing establishment more than nine hours in any one day or fifty-four hours in any one week." Another apportionment of hours could be permitted "for the sole purpose of giving a shorter day's work for one day of the week." The employer had to post a printed copy of the rules "in a conspicuous place," where women worked. Besides, hours for the beginning and ending of the time allowed for meals were to be announced in the same way. The noon break for eating had to last at least sixty minutes, but the commissioner of labor could permit a shorter break. Overtime could only be permitted to compensate for "the stopping of machinery" that the woman was depending on for her work for "no less than thirty consecutive minutes," and only when that stoppage was reported to the commissioner of labor. Another regulation said that no more employees were permitted to work in a room than that every person normally had "not less than four hundred cubic feet of air space." Bad ventilation of the work rooms would be fined. Special requirements were formulated for cleaning of work rooms where women and children were employed for "dusty work." They had to be lime-washed or painted at least once a year and "thoroughly cleaned with soap and water at least every six months," and "every dressing room and water closet [...] in every week."⁷⁸

The Department of Labor and Industries was also engaged in preventing a far-reaching exploitation of cheap labor, especially that of women and children. Certainly, politicians were pushed by the unions and the Socialist Party. By August 1, 1913, Governor Eberhart appointed a Minimum Wage Commission to determine and make effective "living wages" for women and minors. A year later, the Legislature of Minnesota established that no employer whatsoever in larger cities was allowed to employ "any woman or minor of ordinary ability" in any mercantile, office, waitress, or hairdressing occupation at a rate of less than nine dollars for a week of 48 hours or less. It also established that women and minors "of ordinary ability" should not be paid less than \$8.75 in a week of 48 hours or less for work in manufacturing, work in mechanical

⁷⁸ *Laws Regulating the Employment of Children, Prescribing the Hours of Labor for Women, Revised to 1913*, pp. 13–15.

workshops, telephone and telegraph operators, laundries, dyeing and cleaning work, and work in lunch rooms, restaurants, and hotels in larger cities.⁷⁹

However, the Minimum Wage Commission was obstructed by the Minnesota Employers' Association, which carried the issue to court. The law was immediately declared unconstitutional by the Ramsey County district court, and it was "inoperative" by November 24, 1914. The Commission, though, continued its work, although it did not have much in the way of economic resources.⁸⁰

Organized labor and, probably, several non-unionized workers were impatient. In July 1914, for instance, the *Minneapolis Labor Review* headlined the progress thus: "MINIMUM WAGE TOO SLOW." The journalist assured readers that women at work in factories and stores were waiting for the Minimum Wage Commission to do something for them, and s/he added that "these girls" otherwise would be "apt to be old and grey," when the law would be effective. The journalist was not very optimistic about the employers' willingness to raise wages: "Most of the employers show a tendency to kid the public along making it think they are doing something when they are doing nothing." Unsurprisingly, the *Labor Review* encouraged the women workers to unionize:

Women Workers, the time has passed when saying please will get you anything.

Organize and demand a living wage and you will get it.

The whole force of Minneapolis Organized Labor will stand back you.⁸¹

No law was established within the next few years, but a new drive was organized in 1918. A reprint from the Pioneer Press, March 8—thus on Women's International Day—proclaimed "Plan Big Eight-hour Day Demonstration for Thursday" under the title: "WOMEN TO STORM

⁷⁹*Second Biennial Report of the Minnesota Minimum Wage Commission*, Minneapolis, 1922, pp. 78 and 80.

⁸⁰*First Biennial Report of the Minnesota Minimum Wage Commission*, Minneapolis, 1915, p. 3; *Second Biennial Report of the Minnesota Minimum Wage Commission*, pp. 5f. and 63ff., MHS.

⁸¹*Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 31, 1914.

CAPITOL.” “There will be a real demonstration at the Capitol,” declared Eliza Evans, secretary of the State Minimum Wage Commission,

when the eight hour-bill for women is before the House Committee on Labor next Thursday night. The working girls will show the legislature what a real demonstration is. We will pack the Capitol from basement to dome. There will be no doubt in any one’s mind that the women are for an eight-hour day.⁸²

There was certainly vehement resistance against the law. At a national conference in Chicago in September 1918 on women’s work, Agnes Peterson—still superintendent at the Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries—stated that the newly established Committee of Women in Industry had been “determined to give first attention to the question of securing a decision on the minimum wage, which had been pigeon-holed by the Supreme Court for three and a half years.”⁸³ The proposition was, indeed, made into a law on March 9, 1918, it should be noted, at the same time as the Women in Industry Committee started its work for regulated conditions for wage-earning women. Obviously, a majority of the members of the Legislature listened to the women. Among other things, the law required “every employer of women and minors (boys under 21) to keep a register of the names and addresses of his employes [*sic*], the wages that they receive[d] and the hours that they [were] employed per day or per week.” That register was to “be open at any time for inspection by the members of the commission.”⁸⁴ In other words, the legislation of Minnesota expressed serious concern about the employment of women and minors.

On June 26, 1918, the Minimum Wage Commission proclaimed “To Whom it May Concern” that:

No employer [...] shall employ any woman apprentice or learner or any minor apprentice or learner, under eighteen (18) years of age, in any

⁸²Correspondence and Subject Files, Women in Industry, Woman’s Committee, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.K.7.13B, MHS.

⁸³*Report, Conference of Departments of Women in Industry of the Middle-West State Divisions*, Hull House, Chicago, September 13–14, 1918, p. 6, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety Archives, Woman’s Committee*, Location 103.K.6.9 (B), MHS.

⁸⁴*Second Biennial Report of the Minnesota Minimum Wage Commission*, pp. 5f. and 11. MHS.

occupation [...] in the State of Minnesota, at a weekly wage rate of less than Six Dollars (\$6.00) during the first four months following his or her entrance into employment; Seven Dollars (\$7.00) during the second four months following his or her entrance into employment; Eight Dollars (\$8.00) during the third four months following his or her entrance into employment; and thereafter the woman or minor shall be deemed a worker of ordinarily ability.

No employer [...] shall employ any woman apprentice or learner or any minor apprentice or learner, eighteen (18) years of age or over, in any occupation [...], at a weekly wage rate of less than Six Dollars (\$6.00) during the first three months following his or her entrance into employment; Seven Dollars and Fifty Cents (\$7.50) during the second three months following his or her entrance into employment, and thereafter the woman or minor shall be deemed a worker of ordinary ability.⁸⁵

The Minnesota Women's Committee and the Committee on Women in Industry were "especially happy and proud over the recent decision of [the] Supreme Court, which was UNANIMOUS FOR THE MINIMUM WAGE LAW FOR WOMEN AND MINORS IN INDUSTRY." The anonymous secretary concluded that the Minimum Wage Commission "fixed 'a living wage' of \$8.50." She also expressed a common opinion "that women in the trades [were] underpaid, that they [were] not paid so well as men [were] paid for the same service and that in fact in many cases the pay they receive[d] for working during all the working hours of the day [was] not enough to meet the costs of reasonable living." She maintained that these conditions were "dangerous to the morals of the workers and to the health of the workers and of future generations as well" and concluded "that women are not on an equality with men in the economic strife between employer and employee."⁸⁶

A year later, on July 5, 1919, a new minimum wage law was enforced. The Minimum Wage Commission determined that 48 hours of work a week should constitute "a general and reasonable standard of employment" for "women and minors of ordinarily ability" in cities and larger

⁸⁵Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Women's Committee, Correspondence and Subject Files, Women in Industry—Working Conditions for Women and Children, Location 103.K.7.13B, MHS.

⁸⁶Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Women's Committee, Correspondence and Subject Files, Women in Industry—Working Conditions for Women and Children, Location 103.K.7.13B, MHS.

towns in Minnesota. It also determined that the minimum wage for one week's work (48 hours) should not be lower than \$11.00 so that women and minors of ordinary ability should earn sufficient for their living. Employees who worked more than this were to be paid extra 23 cents for every hour beyond 48 hours. At least one copy of the legal rules had to be published in each workroom, where women and minors worked.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *Second Biennial Report of the Minnesota Minimum Wage Commission*, pp. 85f. See also *Women in Industry in Minnesota*, 1921, p. 5. MHS.



The Northwestern Knitting Company— Makers of Munsing Wear

INDUSTRIAL GARMENT MAKING

Like native women in Minnesota, European women who settled there knew very well how to knit, sew, and make garments. All over the world, garment making has a long tradition in household economies, and until the middle of the nineteenth century knitting and sewing were manual and very time-consuming tasks that women, and sometimes some men, performed side by side with other duties in the household. To know “how to handle a needle well” was, according to Joan Jensen, “to possess an important skill.”¹ Wives, daughters and, when they were at hand, female hired hands performed the work in every household, often after the toddlers had fallen asleep. Gradually, some women specialized in sewing and became professional seamstresses, who made their living and contributed to the family economy by sewing garments at home for customers.² Mothers taught their daughters the skill:

Working together, Lucia taught her children how to sew the invisible seams by hand, while she did the more complex sewing. As they grew

¹Joan M. Jensen, “Needlework as Art, Craft and Livelihood Before 1900,” in J. Jensen and S. Davidson (eds.), *A Needle, A Bobbin, A Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 3.

²My mother Asta Olsson was one of them when I was a child in Sweden in the 1950s.

older, she taught them to sew the entire garment on their own; and once they became experienced, they went to work in the factories.³

By the end of the nineteenth century, industrial garment making was being mechanized and factory work was subdivided. The first knitting machines were constructed according to the reciprocatory, or back and forth, principles, but the rotary or circular knitting machines had a more simple construction and operated much more efficiently. A commercial breakthrough for making stockings happened in the 1850s, but “[u]nderwear was the next logical extension of their capability.” By 1900, the fabrics were knitted in tubular forms, and the efficiency of knitting machines rose dramatically when electricity was introduced as the moving power of the machines. The knitting machines were developed as regards the needles, the yarn supply, the take-up mechanisms, and stop motions.⁴ Most important of all for commercial use of knitting machines, though, was the invention of automatic machines when one worker could “supervise many machines, stop them as necessary, make the needed repairs easily, and quickly resume production.” Fully fashioned knitting, however, did not become “commercially feasible” until the late 1800s, but the knitting machine was already being called “the companion to the sewing machine” by the mid-nineteenth century.⁵

The first sewing machine was constructed in 1834, and it was succeeded by several different types. The first Singer machine was made in 1851 with a foot treadle attached to the machine. This replaced the hand wheel so that both hands could be used for working with the knitwear. Both straight and curved seams could be sewn by these machine, so more complicated work could be performed with their use. By 1870, no fewer than 700,000 sewing machines were produced annually, and the Singer Company alone produced nearly 130,000 machines per year. So, in spite of some female resistance, a lot of women operated sewing machines at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶

³Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880–1945*, Chapel Hill, 2010, p. 45.

⁴Louise Wehrle, *Fingers of Steel: Technological Innovation in the United States Knitting Industry 1850–1914*, New York and London, 1995, pp. 101–143.

⁵Wehrle, 1995, pp. 27ff, 72 and 57.

⁶Charles E. Zaretsz, *The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, New York, 1934, pp. 20f; Ava Baron and Susan E. Klepp, “‘If I Didn’t Have My Sewing Machine...’: Women and Sewing Machine Technology,” in J. Jensen and S. Davidson (eds.), 1984,

The nineteenth-century garment industry is known for the notorious sweatshop system, especially in New England cities. It was a pre-industrial capitalist mode of production, where a capitalist hired male cutters to work in his shop. These aristocrats of the trade “designed the garment, made the pattern, selected the fabrics and trimming, [and] cut the cloth.”⁷ They wrapped the cut cloth into bundles, each containing the material for one garment, and the bundles were sent to outside contractors, who employed tailoring workers, mostly women, to complete the garments in their homes. These women “basted, lined, seamed, trimmed, made the buttonholes, and sewed on the buttons. In most cases they also washed, ironed, and folded the clothing before returning it to the shop for payment of work done.” The contractor delivered the garments to the capitalist, who sold them to retailers.⁸ The sweatshop system implied “a tremendous saving in rent, superintendence and in other items” for the capitalist, who had no responsibility at all for the workers who made the garments in their homes.⁹

Some contractors organized work in shops at their disposal, but both ways of organizing sweatshops were notorious for the ruthless exploitation of the workers. The Irish immigrant hosiery worker and labor activist Leonora Barry reported at a Knights of Labor (KOL) meeting in Philadelphia in 1888 about female garment workers, who “huddled together in close, stifling back-rooms.”¹⁰ The poor earnings varied quite a lot over the year, since garment work often was seasonal.¹¹ Several critical reports on the sweatshop system were published, but it “remained the most prevalent manufacturing unit in the garment industry during

p. 31; J. Jensen, “Needlework as Art, Craft and Livelihood before 1900,” in Jensen and Davidson (eds.), 1984, pp. 13f.

⁷ Baron and Klepp, 1984, p. 22.

⁸ Baron and Klepp, 1984, pp. 22 and 40. Francis J. Haas, *Shop Collective Bargaining: A Study of Wage Determination in the Men's Garment Industry*, Washington DC, 1922, pp. 1 and 4f; McCreesh, 1985, pp. 5 and 13. See also Kathy Friedman-Kasaba, *Memoirs of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women in New York, 1870–1924*, New York, 1996.

⁹ *Documentary History of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, V, 1914–1916, New York, 1920, pp. viff.

¹⁰ Baron and Klepp, 1984, p. 22.

¹¹ *Documentary History of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, V, 1914–1916, p. 37.

the final years of the nineteenth century.”¹² The contemporary economist Francis J. Haas characterized it as “the darkest period in the history of the [garment] industry” in the United States.¹³

There were, however, disadvantages for the capitalists and the contractors with the sweatshop system. One was that “outside work was not done in a uniform way,” which made it “difficult to standardize production for mass sale.”¹⁴ Moreover, home-working laborers decided by themselves how much time and energy they could or would devote to work for the contractor. At least in theory. Even if the notoriously low wages forced poor working-class people to devote most of their daytime to work for the contractors, the physical capacity of human beings put limits on what could be accomplished. There were, after all, limits to the extensive exploitation of workers. Children could be—and were—involved in work in the sweatshops, but they could not contribute very much until they were 5–6 years of age. Nor could very old and very sick family members contribute. Every human being has to get some rest, so the workday could not be prolonged beyond, let us say, 17 hours a day. Consequently, manufacturers changed to more intensified ways of exploitation to expand their business.¹⁵

One way for the capitalists to minimize disadvantages was to centralize the making of goods in mechanized factories, where they or their supervisors and foremen/ladies could control the labor process and exploit the workers intensively during the long working day. Many manufacturing capitalists opened modern factories instead of relying on small contractors and their “pitifully dependent sweatshop workers.” Moreover, “[a]n increasing availability of capital and credit permitted manufacturers to introduce electrically powered machines into these new factories.” The electric sewing machine was the most important of these machines, but also edge-pressing, collar and label padding, and felling

¹²McCresh, 1985, p. 2. See also Joel Seidman, *The Needle Trades*, New York, 1942, Ch. 3.

¹³Haas, 1922, pp. 4f.

¹⁴Baron and Klepp, 1984, p. 42.

¹⁵For a discussion of extensive and intensive exploitation of workers, see Lars Olsson, “Industrial Capitalism and Child Labour in Sweden, 1800–1930,” in Kristoffel Lieten and Elise van Nederveen Merkerk (eds.), *Child Labour's Global Past, 1650–2000*, Bern, 2011, pp. 329f.

machines were introduced.¹⁶ Machines for specialized operations were of the greatest importance for the centralizing of garment making; especially buttonhole making and button-sewing machines. At the beginning of the twentieth century, an operator could obtain “first-class results” at a rate of 4400 stitches per minute compared to 800 when the operator used foot power.¹⁷

The use of electricity as motive power not only made greater speed possible but also put more strain on the workers. In a survey of the US garment industry, sociologist Josephine Goldmark noted in 1905:

The operative cannot see the needle; she sees merely a beam of light striking the steel needle from the electric lamp above her head. But this she must watch, as a cat watches a mousehole; for one variation means that a broken needle is cutting the fibers of the garment, and a different variation means that the thread is broken and the seam is having stitches left unsewn. Then the operative must instantly touch a button and stop the machine. Such intent watching wears out alike nerves and eyes.¹⁸

Another advantage for the capitalists of the large-scale, centralized production was that the division of labor in the garment industry could be extended in quite another way than contractors could do in the sweatshop system. In 1922, Haas concluded:

To illustrate, in a small or poorly equipped shop one worker may be obliged to perform eight different tasks. In a large factory these same tasks may be performed by eight different persons. Manifestly, the worker in the small shop is not able to acquire the same speed and dexterity on any one of his eight tasks, on task number five for instance, that a worker in a large shop can acquire who performs this task exclusively [. . .] Stated in another form, since a small establishment must employ a relatively larger number of skilled workers, its piece rates will be higher than those in large factories where subdivision is more practicable and profitable because of the larger number of unskilled operatives.¹⁹

¹⁶McCreesh, 1985, p. 72. See also Haas, 1922, p. 2.

¹⁷Zaretz, 1934, pp. 20ff.

¹⁸Quotation in Woodcock Tentler, 1979, p. 31.

¹⁹Haas, 1922, p. 89.

Improvements could also be made in the logistics of plant arrangements by maintaining machines and mechanical processes “in proper efficiency” and by not “congesting or delaying work passing from one section of operatives to the next.”²⁰ An employer could decrease the wages for workers who were trained for one single operation. Haas referred to Dr. William M. Leiserson, who advised company directors of the Taylor Society in 1920:

Give [the worker] time, a year or two of experience at the same operation, and he will increase his production fifty percent, sometimes a hundred percent. I have seen it done again and again. Then somehow the employer thinks there is something the matter with the rate [*sic*]. The worker is earning too much! And if the employer doesn’t change the rate directly he will make some change in the operation so that a change in the rate can be made indirectly.²¹

Haas noted that piecework also reduced the cost to employers of both the immediate expense of foremen and the cost of turnover and stoppages. Both were “frequently due to ‘bothering’ or ‘driving’—the natural accompaniments of time work.”²² In this study we will see how far the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company were familiar with contemporary discussions of scientific management and practiced them at their plant in Minneapolis.

KNITTING AND SEWING—WOMEN’S WORK

It doesn’t look as if the notorious sweatshop system ever occurred in Minnesota. Instead, the garment industry was organized in small industrial plants where poorly paid women were exploited. In 1888, Eleanor Marx-Aveling spoke to socialists in Minneapolis about the bad working conditions for female garment workers in the city, and, after listening to the daughter of Karl Marx and to some of these women workers on a streetcar, the undercover reporter Eva McDonald decided to visit these factories and “find out by observation the condition of this class of wage workers.” In March 1888, she reported:

²⁰ Haas, 1922, p. 99.

²¹ Haas, 1922, p. 97.

²² Haas, 1922, pp. 99f.

Sewing machines, run by electricity or steam, are used. They are fastened in a double row on either side of tables running length the room. Before each machine sits a girl, who receives her work from the cutter's hand, and it goes from her machine ready for sale at remarkable low price. A row of lamps, directly over the machines, furnishes a good light when day light is insufficient.²³

Eva McDonald visited at their noonday lunch and found that several women were "resting their aching heads on the tables, trying to catch a short nap in the midst of the confusion." She concluded:

All were so busy that I did not venture many questions. I found they worked an average of ten hours a day, work being performed by the piece. Sometimes they only worked for a few hours of the day, as the work was not ready for the machines. Wages did not seem a pleasant topic, questions in that direction being met by a shrug of the shoulders and a remark to the effect that wages had been cut so much during the past year that only experienced hands could make living wages.

In one factory she was told that the windows of the workrooms were painted "so the girls won't waste any time looking out."²⁴ At another factory, the machines were of "the ordinary sort run by foot power," and that the firm did not furnish the machines. Instead, said one woman, "we buy our machines out of our regular wages, and move or repair them at our own expense." Another woman told Eva McDonald that "we can rent a machine from the firm at \$3 a month." At a third factory the women had to buy a steam-powered machine from the company for \$35 and sell it back to the company at \$10 or \$15 when they quit, since "this sort of machine wouldn't be of any use without the power to run it."²⁵ Certainly, the return price made the women hesitate to leave the company.

The garment industry expanded after the turn of the century. In 1909, the directors of 10 factories employed 1052 women and men for knitting goods in Minnesota, and in 1914 as many as 2088

²³ *St. Paul Globe*, March 25, 1888. Her articles are collected in the unpublished manuscript *A Dollar a Day: Eva Gay's Firsthand Accounts of Women at Work in Minneapolis*, (ed.) Joseph Hart, Minneapolis, 2012.

²⁴ *St. Paul Globe*, April 1, 1888. Quoted in Hart, 2012.

²⁵ *St. Paul Globe*, April 8, 1888. Quoted in Hart, 2012.

employees made their living in 13 factories. In 1919, knit goods were produced in 16 plants in Minnesota. Altogether, 4034 persons were engaged in these establishments: 9 as proprietors and firm members, 56 as salaried officers, superintendents and managers, 117 as male and 288 as female clerks, while 3564 men and women were employed as blue-collar workers. The knitting industry ranked in sixth place in Minnesota after cars and general shop construction, lumber industry, flour milling, and slaughtering and meat packing.²⁶

Most workers within the knitting industry, 83%, were women, but, on the other hand, practically no child labor was registered.²⁷ Obviously, employers of the knitting industry in Minnesota, including the Northwestern Knitting Company, did not, at least officially, break the Minnesota labor laws on child labor. Bryner proposed that employers hesitated to employ young people “because of various complications which arise in connection with the age and schooling certification of girls between the ages of 16 and 18.” Those employers who did hire young girls of 16–18 were mostly “small contracting shops or larger establishments having regular systems of instruction.”²⁸ In Minnesota, thus, the complicated rules for employing children younger than 16 years of age prevented the exploitation of child labor. Maybe, though, new technology and reorganization of work also mattered.²⁹

Most of the 16 plants were small. In 12 of them there were fewer than 20 employees. In one of them 43 employees made their living, in another one 74 men and women did so, and in a third plant there were 354 women and men in gainful employment. But there was one large, outstanding plant where no fewer than 3013 employees earned their living.³⁰

²⁶ *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Vol. IX, Manufactures 1919, Reports for selected industries, Knit Goods, Minnesota, Tables 3, 8, 10, 29, 35, and 36.

²⁷ *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Vol. IV, Population, Occupations, Table 20.

²⁸ Bryner, 1916, p. 54f.

²⁹ In my research on industrial child labor in Sweden, I have demonstrated how the division of labor enabled mechanization of subdivided tasks and how child labor decreased due to those changes. See Olsson, 2011.

³⁰ *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Vol. X, Manufactures 1919, Reports for selected industries, Knit Goods, Table 8, and Vol. IX, Table 10.

THE NORTHWESTERN KNITTING COMPANY/THE MUNSINGWEAR CORPORATION

In 1886, George D. Munsing, a superintendent at the Rochester Knitting Works, moved to Minneapolis in order to establish a company for the production of knitted goods. He entered into a partnership with two other young men from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and established the Northwestern Knitting Company. These Yankee partners prepared for production, and Munsing constructed and installed some hand-powered V-bed knitting machines. In 1887, the company was registered in the statutes of Minnesota “for the purpose of carrying on a general business in the manufacture and sale of all kinds of knitted fabrics and holding of inventions, patent rights, real estate and machinery.”³¹ They hired women to work for them and started the production of fully fashioned two-piece knitted underwear suits for both men and women.³²

Already in April 1887, three of the wealthiest and most powerful capitalists in Minneapolis opened their eyes to the potential of the small company for expansion and profit making, and they entered it as stockholders: Charles A. Pillsbury, who dominated the flour milling industry; the banker and manufacturer Clinton Morrison; and the street railway magnate and land speculator Thomas Lowry.³³ These three Anglo-American gentlemen not only provided the company with capital but entered the board of directors in 1889,³⁴ and they took over the company management by replacing two of the founders with new men as directors. Charles S. Gold entered the staff of officers as treasurer and

³¹Records of the Business and Management of the Northwestern Knitting Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, incorporated March 1, 1887, p. 5, *Munsingwear Inc., Records, 1887–1979*, Box 2, Location 148.G.10.10 (F), MHS.

³²Unless otherwise stated, this part of the text is based on *The Story of Munsingwear, 1886–1961*, Minneapolis, 1964, pp. 7–26, and Marcia G. Anderson, “An Underwear for America,” in *Minnesota History*, Vol. 50: 4.

³³Records of the Business and Management of the Northwestern Knitting Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, incorporated March 1, 1887, p. 29, *Munsingwear Inc., Records, 1887–1979*, Box 2, Location 148.G.10.10 (F), MHS.

³⁴Extracts from Minutes of the Northwestern Knitting Company Directors’ Meeting on January 7, 1889, Extracts 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 (B), MHS.

Edgar J. Couper as secretary in 1891.³⁵ Munsing, who knew how to develop the machinery, stayed on the board and remained a stockholder. To expand the production, a new plant was opened in a larger space, where around 70 women were employed to knit goods and make garments and profits for the company.

In May 1888, Eva McDonald visited the Northwestern Knitting Company and reported to the public:

The garments are knit on machines, thence passing to girls who finish the edges with a row or two of crocheting, put on by hand; narrow ribbons are sometimes added around neck and sleeves of vest, and the garments are steamed, pressed and folded into proper shape for sale.³⁶

However, things could go wrong, and a machine could drop stitches in knitting, which might cause a big hole. “I mend those holes,” one woman told McDonald, and she added: “Sometimes my back aches and I get tired out and don’t do the work as good as it ought to be; then the forelady comes along, makes me rip it out and do it all over again.” One hundred of the better “girls” worked “by the week” and did not have to wait for work, while those who worked “by the piece” could “lose two or three hours a day waiting for work to be given out.” McDonald “failed to see how any employer having regard for the health or comfort of employees could pack 150 girls in a factory of that size along with the necessary machinery.” The workroom was “quite long and narrow,” lacked “proper means of ventilation,” and “the air seemed close and unwholesome.” McDonald concluded that it looked as if “a thorough cleaning would be a much-needed improvement,” although that workplace was “no dirtier than many other factories.”

The women’s work was supervised by a man, but Eva McDonald also reacted to the power of the foreladies over the working women:

I noticed a very pretty, well-dressed little lady flitting around here and there amongst the girls, stopping now and then to accept a bit of pie or

³⁵Extracts from Minutes of the Northwestern Knitting Company, The Directors’ Annual Meetings, March 4, 1891, Extracts 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 (B), MHS.

³⁶Eva Gay, “Hardships of a Knitting Factory,” *St. Paul Globe*, May 6, 1888. Quoted from Hart, 2012.

cake, or perhaps a generous half of some girl's apple or orange. From experience a specimen of the genus "forelady" as far off as I can see her, and immediately I placed this little lady in that class.

She added, "this forelady must be better than the average, for she isn't too proud to eat her dinner with the girls, seeming to be very companionable."

McDonald also noticed that the women did not talk to each other in working hours, and one woman told her that "there is a rule against it." Nor were they allowed to sing, laugh, eat, or "look out the windows." To her question if they were monitored at work, one woman answered: "O, we have a kind of overseer here, just as they used to have over niggers down south; he keeps his little book and when he catches a girl breaking one of those rules he just marks it down." He also noted those women who came in late after the noon break, and "if he feels like it he will discharge a girl for taking an afternoon off." When a girl had got "the right number of marks either he makes it so disagreeable for her that she leaves or else discharges her." Certainly, "it made quite a difference whether the offending girl was a favorite or not," one woman stated, and another one added that the overseer "threatens to paint the windows so as to take away the temptation of looking out."

Eva McDonald could not really understand why there were so many rules when most women were paid by the piece. Well, "the proprietors say that we western girls are too independent and we need these strict rules to show us our proper place. They say one eastern factory girl is worth a whole cart load of such as we," one woman explained. McDonald concluded that most women at the Northwestern Knitting Company were "cheerful and intelligent," and "evidently" they "hadn't been under factory discipline long enough to render them otherwise." Thus, they were not fully subordinated to the discipline that constituted a part of industrial capitalism.³⁷

³⁷Maybe Minnesota was a little late in this respect compared to (New) England. In a travel report from Sweden in the late 1850s, C. L. Brace reported about an English inspector who expressed similar concerns about disciplinary problems with female workers at a Swedish textile factory. The inspector explained that Sweden was an old-fashioned industrial country and that it would take some time before the work discipline would be the same as that of English and American (New England) workers. C. L. Brace, *The Norse Folk, or, a Visit to the Homes of Norway and Sweden*, London, 1857, p. 147.

Since the new investors saw great opportunities to make more profits by expanding the production at the company, they installed a new director as “an aggressive business head.” C. S. Gold, “lawful attorney” of Charles Pillsbury, was appointed for the purpose, and he had the company board buy land at Lyndale Avenue North, where he initiated the building of a plant with a basement and two stories. Production started in the beginning of 1891.³⁸

Indeed, like their colleagues in Pennsylvania, the financial and industrial capitalists of Minneapolis realized that “[i]n the earlier years there was little for women to do outside their homes, but in about 1900 some far-sighted men saw this idle labor supply and had visions of utilizing it.”³⁹ Within some years the number of employees at the Northwestern Knitting Company had doubled, and Charles Munsing had left its management; he was more of an inventor and technician than a businessman and capitalist. In January 1895, Frederick M. Stowell was installed as superintendent.⁴⁰

By the start of the new century, the directors had already decided that the officers should “proceed with the erection and equipment of an addition to the original building on ground recently acquired.”⁴¹ New space made expansion of production possible. In June 1901, the directors purchased new machinery,⁴² and they strengthened the company’s position in the political economy of Minneapolis by recruiting John R. Van Derlip, who served as notary public for the city, to the board of directors.

By 1905, the company had once again outgrown its plant and the directors had additional buildings erected for a large and well-equipped establishment. The *Munsing Underwear Magazine*, a magazine for

³⁸Records of the Business and Management of the Northwestern Knitting Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, incorporated March 1, 1887, p. 54, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 2, Location 148.G.10.10 (F), MHS.

³⁹Caroline Manning, *The Immigrant Woman and Her Job*, New York 1970, Reprint of the United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1930, p. 4.

⁴⁰Extracts from Minutes of the Northwestern Knitting Co., 1887–1925, Directors’ Meeting January 4, 1895, and Annual Meeting of Directors of January 5, 1895, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁴¹Extracts from Minutes of the Stockholders’ and Directors’ Meetings, 1887–1925, Meeting of November 5, 1900, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁴²Special Directors’ Meeting, June 26, 1901, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 2, Location 148.G.10.F, MHS.

marketing Munsing Wear, described its character as being “a long stretch from the New England grandmother, and even a longer one from Minnehaha and her Indian sisters who lived here but a few years ago, comparatively, and made garments from the skins which Hiawatha brought from the chase.”⁴³

The company directors determined to establish their business “on lines that would enable them to supply the wants of the entire country instead of being merely a local concern.” They had been successful in that respect within flour milling, so they “could not see any reason why a knitting mill might not prosper, even though it did bring its yarn largely from the Atlantic coast.”⁴⁴ Consequently, they “standardized and perfected” the methods of manufacturing, and they developed the marketing of the garments and made them “harmonize with a more popular demand.”⁴⁵

In 1906, the Northwestern Knitting Company had, according to its own propaganda, a “system and organization as applied in the operation of machinery of the latest and most improved type [. . .] and the highest point of efficiency.” More than 10,000 garments were produced every day, and due to mass production, the managers had been able “to subdivide labor and responsibility to such an extent that perfection [was] assured in every process of manufacture.” The work-rooms had light “upon at least three sides, so that there [was] *no chance for imperfect work or insufficient inspection* (my italics).”⁴⁶ The readers of the *Munsing Underwear Magazine* learned:

Visitors to the mill[,] while naturally interested in the knitting and finishing machinery, the devices for labor saving, and convenient arrangements of work-rooms, are especially impressed by the order and regularity with which the product passes from each department successively, by the economic plan of time saving and waste saving, and by the proficiency and rapidity of its operatives. The nearly five hundred wholesome looking, neat and exceedingly expert young women who are paid by the piece and are

⁴³ *The Munsing Underwear Magazine*, September 1906, p. 39.

⁴⁴ *The Munsing Underwear Magazine*, September 1906, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 7f., Mimeographed Paper, April 1923, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

⁴⁶ *The Munsing Underwear Magazine*, September 1906, p. 38, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 35, Location 148.C14.6F, MHS. That volume seems to be the only one kept from that time in the company records.

adepts in handling each particular part of the garment entrusted to them are a revelation in orderly industry. With apparent ease and no confusion, these young women turn out ten thousand complete garments per day and their work is never slighted in any detail.⁴⁷

So, piece work and a determined division of labor had, according to the principles of scientific management, been introduced to the company. A visitor described the intensive work and the subordination of 500 female workers under the management:

Today the deft fingers of young women in the great knitting mill in Minneapolis keep thirty-two thousand five hundred needles busy, thus measuring daily thousands of yards of knit goods [. . .] But this is what one naturally would expect to find in a factory *controlled by men determined to reach success* even in the face of what might seem to be difficult conditions. (my italics)⁴⁸

The transformation of the company into a large, gendered capitalist establishment had come true:

No visitor can fail to be impressed with the army of deft-handed girls who, neat and capable and swift, guide these and all the machines used throughout the factory in such a way as to get the best and fullest results. Quiet and efficient, these young women watch the machines and, in the sewing rooms, quickly turn and guide the fabrics so that the best possible work and as much as possible shall be done at each stage. The greatest care and accuracy are demanded, no slighted and imperfect work being tolerated from machine or maid.⁴⁹

Thus, the women workers were considered to be an “army of girls,” and the last sentence, unintentionally, reveals that the work organization was based on discipline and control, and that the workers indeed were subordinated to “men determined to reach success.” Moreover, an increasing number of women were hired, when patriarchy and industrial capitalism operated dependently.

⁴⁷ *The Munsing Underwear Magazine*, September 1906, p. 37.

⁴⁸ *The Munsing Underwear Magazine*, September 1906, p. 38.

⁴⁹ *The Munsing Underwear Magazine*, September 1906, p. 39.

Indeed, these Anglo-American men were successful. At the directors' meetings on January 5 and 6, 1904, it was announced that the net profit for the year 1903 was \$105,416 and that the books showed a surplus amounting to \$195,961. Consequently, a dividend of 50% was paid on the capital stock.⁵⁰ In January 1909, Charles S. Gold, Frederick M. Stowell, Edgar J. Couper, and Clinton Morrison owned stocks to a value of \$100,000 each, and the brothers Charles S. and John S. Pillsbury owned stocks for \$50,000 each. Altogether, these rich and powerful men owned stocks that made up half of the stock capital. One year later, these gentlemen's joint stock value had increased to \$850,000, divided in the same proportions as before.⁵¹ At the end of the business year of 1909, the board could tell the stockholders that the last year had resulted in a surplus of "more than four hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$450,000)," which could be compared to the payroll for the year which amounted to \$221,247.16. Charles Pillsbury told the stockholders that the corporation "require[d] the maintenance at this time of so large a surplus," resolving "to distribute among the now existing stockholders three hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$350,000)," ⁵² indeed, a really nice profit quota! The Northwestern Knitting Company was a very prosperous company in the hands of a few very rich, male, Anglo-American capitalists.

In the succeeding years, the surplus values amounted two to three times the total payroll values (Table 3.1), and the directors decided to raise their own annual salaries. By January 2, 1912, F. M. Stowell as president and E. J. Couper as first vice-president earned \$17,500 each, and were upgraded to \$20,000 for the next year, while the second vice-president W. C. Spaulding got \$12,000, and the third vice-president George E. Rutledge \$6000 a year by 1913. For 1914 these salaries were confirmed, and the board decided that the treasurer Charles S. Gould should be paid \$7500 annually.⁵³

⁵⁰Extracts from the Minutes of the Stockholders' and Directors' Meetings, 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁵¹Northwestern Knitting Mills, Misc. legal documents 1903–1912, Agreement of January 12, 1909 and January 17, 1910, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁵²Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Record Book 1910–July, 1919, pp. 2–3. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B (B), MHS. This information was not noted in the extracts!

⁵³Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Record Book 1910–July, 1919, pp. 41, 75 and 110, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B (B), MHS.

Table 3.1 Annual wages and surplus of the Northwestern Knitting Company, 1910–1912

	<i>Payroll values</i>	<i>Surplus values</i>
1910	\$29,408,149	\$65,556,226
1911	\$32,732,402	\$98,967,704
1912	\$40,034,557	\$124,769,486

Source Secretary’s Record Book, 1910–July 1919, pp. 31, 43, 67, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B (ov), MHS. Unfortunately, the payroll values are reported only for the years 1910–1912

At the beginning of 1914, the “determined” and successful directors of the company decided to erect a new five-story building, but soon they agreed “that three more stories [should] be added to the new five-story factory building contracted for.”⁵⁴ The directors expected the successes of the company to continue its development dramatically. In fact, the Northwestern Knitting Company developed into the largest plant of its kind in the United States, and it revolutionized the underwear industry in all America. A journalist was more than impressed:

The buildings are modern, of fireproof construction, perfectly lighted and ventilated, and are kept absolutely clean and sanitary. The air, which is forced through the buildings by great fans, is washed before it enters the workrooms. In other words, not only the temperature is regulated, but also the humidity and the purity of the air which the employees breathe. In the summer time, the temperature is reduced by the washing of air with cool water, so that frequently when the temperature outside is in the 90s the temperature in the mill is ten to fifteen degrees cooler.⁵⁵

The directors expected that the company would produce at least 8,000,000 garments a year, i.e. more than 25,000 garments per day. Moreover, the progressive mechanization and rationalization “*created a variety of light, unskilled jobs for low wage labor*” (my italics) and the

⁵⁴Extracts from Minutes of the Stockholders’ and Directors’ Meetings, 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁵⁵F. M. Stowell’s scrapbook, p. 13 *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS. No information on which newspaper the clipping is taken from.

profitable business “required myriads of assemblers, light machine tenders, sorters, and packers.” It had an enormous importance for the growing city, since “at least every tenth person who wears a knit union suit wears Munsingwear.”⁵⁶ The Northwestern Knitting Company was one of the most advanced industrial plants of the Upper Midwest at the time. It was a feature of the business district in Minneapolis, and its Munsingwear Whistle, “a steam whistle with three different tones” that “could be heard all over Minneapolis,” announced “on the second” when working time started and when it ended.⁵⁷ Today, the construction is a spectacular cultural and commercial center of Minneapolis.

Certainly, the workers could enjoy the excellent air as well. The company directors did admit that there were other reasons behind the efficient ventilating system of the mill than the solely humanitarian. In the article “Heating and Ventilating” in the *Munsingwear News*, the anonymous author underlined to the employees that “proper conditioning of the air” was “particularly important in the knitting of cloth.” If the air was too dry,

the threads [...] will become exceedingly hard to handle, as they will become highly charged with static electricity, which will cause the individual threads to strongly repel each other. It is only by providing proper moisture content in the air that this difficulty is remedied.⁵⁸

The journalist did not, however, inform the readers of the magazine about the importance of “proper conditioning of the air” for the efficiency of the work, the quality of the products, and, in the end, the profits to the stockholders. Instead, they learned that the company “has attracted not only the attention of the businessmen of the city, but has been a matter of comment in the knit goods industry [. . .] throughout the United States,” so the prospects for the future were considered to be excellent. Expansion would be limited only by the capacity of the mill.

⁵⁶A newspaper clipping in F. M. Stowell’s scrapbook, p. 13. *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS. No information on which newspaper the clipping is taken from, nor on the date that it was taken.

⁵⁷Clarence Tolg, *The Lore of Uncle Foggy as told to Allen Gray: Reminiscences, Philosophy, and Some Practical Advice from a Fine Old Gentleman*, Clarence Tolg, Minneapolis, 1973, p. 29.

⁵⁸*Munsingwear News*, February 1916, p. 6.

In fact, the company directors seem to have faced just one problem, namely, to get as many employees as could be put to perform profitable work. In July 1914, a welfare secretary accused the “too big, broad-minded liberal Western men,” who employed women in Minneapolis and wanted to discharge low-paid women due to the “business depression”:

In regard to your saying that you will have to lay off some girls, you need have no fear about their welfare. Only today I called up the *Northwestern Knitting Co.* and they told me that *they were never able to obtain a full complement of girls.* (my italics)⁵⁹

At the time, about 200 men and 1500 women worked for the company, but the number of hired hands would increase “as fast as new machinery can be installed and help can be trained.” With the existing labor force at the time, at least every fortieth home in the city was said to have part of its income “from the Munsingwear payroll.” The plant was operated at full capacity throughout the year, so the employees could have “steady work at good wages.”⁶⁰ The work was not of seasonal character, mostly because the making of men’s garments was not that exposed to changes in style as women’s garments was.⁶¹ So, if they wanted, the workers could earn their living all the year round at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Indeed, the directors did not at all like to hire workers for temporary work but rather wanted them on a long-term basis.

The company was also praised by the *Union Labor Bulletin*, issued by United Union Card and Label Council of Minneapolis:

These mills are the best equipped and most sanitary of any ever erected on the American continent [...] As for the labor conditions in this immense factory only words of praise can be offered. The management is fair and just, and a reasonable wage is given in return for reasonable service [...].⁶²

In August 1917, the bulletin once again praised the working conditions at the plant:

⁵⁹ *Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 17, 1914, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Unknown newspaper article. F. M. Stowell’s scrapbook, p. 13 *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

⁶¹ Bryner, 1916, p. 95.

⁶² *Union Labor Bulletin*, April 1915, p. 36.

It is fitted with the latest of improved machinery, is well lighted, heated, and ventilated, and from a sanitary standpoint one of the most perfect industrial establishments that has yet been devised [...] All [directors] are public spirited, enterprising citizens who are to be congratulated on the enduring success they have attained with their achievements and in the perfect conduct of this mammoth factory that has done so much to spread about in the land the fame of Minneapolis as a manufacturing center.⁶³

The respectful appraisal of the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company is remarkable. It goes far beyond the social peace that the war efforts and their backing by the American Federation of Labor and Minnesota Federation of Labor warranted. No wonder the company advertised its products in the very same volume of the bulletin. And, indeed, the bulletin unveiled its political position by stating in the Labor Day edition of 1916 that the anti-union Civic and Commerce Association was “deserving of credit for good work [. . .] in bringing Minneapolis to the front industrially and commercially.”⁶⁴ In fact, the editors of the bulletin tried to convince its readers that it was a pro-labor magazine, while it instead supported the social forces that later backed the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety and its struggle to maintain the existing social order of Minneapolis.

The directors of the company were not only highly esteemed by the establishment of the city, but they also earned a fortune out of the work of the employees. In January 1916, the salaries of the directors were raised once again: the president F. M. Stowell and the first vice-president E. J. Couper received \$25,000 each a year, the second vice-president Frank Chatfield \$6500, the treasurer Charles S. Gold \$7500 and the comptroller Kirschenstein \$4000 a year.⁶⁵

And, indeed, the fiscal year of 1916, when Europe was at war, was a very prosperous year for the company. The company president Stowell reported to the stockholders:

In spite of the deplorable conditions in Europe, and contrary to what seemed likely to ensue as respects business conditions in this country, we

⁶³ *Union Labor Bulletin*, August 1917, p. 8. See also the May volume of 1918, p. 14.

⁶⁴ *Union Labor Bulletin*, Labor Day Edition 1916, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 149. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

have, as a nation, shown, during the year 1916, the most tremendous increase in volume of business ever recorded. This company has experienced its fair share in the wonderful impetus given to business and has shown an increased volume of sales over the previous year of 41.29% [. . .], and *the entire combination of circumstances has brought about a net result which I am sure will be gratifying to you all.* (my italics)⁶⁶

Stowell, though, added that the directors “recently authorized the officers to take action in recognition of the present high living costs experienced by our force of employees, and, as you know, arrangements have been made for a temporary increase in their earnings.” He hoped that they would “be able to continue such increase as long as present living conditions continue,” but he could not assure that. Unfortunately, there is no information in the records of these increases.

The first year of the United States’ participation in the war was another prosperous year for the company. The president told the stockholders that “we surely should count ourselves *truly fortunate in experiencing during 1917 the most satisfactory year we have ever had* (my italics).”⁶⁷ At the end of the business year, the results showed a surplus of \$750,000, and undivided profits of \$1,233,648. The total business volume was \$7,272,426. The “compensation” to Stowell (president) and Couper (first vice-president) was still \$25,000 each, but in addition they were to have “an amount to each equal to 3 percent of the net earnings of the corporation for each year,” i.e. 1917–1920.⁶⁸

For the business year 1918, the surplus was \$787,500 and the undivided profits \$1,582,383. In July 1918, the joint stock capital was raised from \$1,500,000 to \$3,100,000.⁶⁹ One reason, perhaps the most important, why 1918 was a very prosperous year was, according to Stowell, that “*we produced thousands of dozens of shirts and drawers for*

⁶⁶Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 159. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁶⁷Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 198. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁶⁸Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 171. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁶⁹Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 201. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

the United States Army (my italics).⁷⁰ In the report to the stockholders in January 1919, however, he added that there might be “new problems and many perplexities” ahead of the company after the war ended. “Our work for the United States Army has ceased, and we have yet before us the problem of adjustment of contracts with the Government.”⁷¹ Thus, the war was very profitable for the company, especially the directors and the stockholders, and after the war the directors worried rather a lot about profits.

Unfortunately, the payroll amounts were not accounted for between 1913 and 1919. But for the fiscal year of 1920 it was announced to be \$729,705.49, compared with “Undivided profits [...] amounting to \$2,032,815.84.”⁷² So, the stockholders still earned close to three dollars on every payroll dollar. F. M. Stowell found that profit quota to be “reasonable,” while he told the stockholders about the business year of 1919: “We have striven to pay wages that are equitable and just, having in mind at all times the necessities of the worker and the trend of the times.”⁷³ Still, a lot of wage-earning women earned on or below the subsistence level in 1918.

The number of employees increased from about 1700 in 1914 to 2000 in 1917 and to no less than a good 3000 in 1918. In his report to stockholders in January 1919, Stowell reported that the company “at the highest point of enrollment” had “something over seven hundred more men and women employed than at any previous time.” That enrollment was certainly not easily done. He explained:

We strove desperately to augment as much as possible our corps of workers, and in spite of the inroads made in our ranks by governmental

⁷⁰President’s report to stockholders January 6, 1920, p. 2, Minutes of Board of Directors, January 6, 1920–December 14, 1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B (ov), MHS.

⁷¹Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 241, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁷²The Munsingwear Corporation. Income and Profit & Loss Account. Year ended November 30, 1920, Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book II, 1919–1925, p. 62, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁷³President’s report to stockholders January 6, 1920, p. 2, Minutes of Board of Directors, January 6, 1920–December 14, 1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B (ov), MHS.

man-power requirements, and in spite of many discouraging obstacles, our enrollment of workers reached higher totals than ever before in our history.⁷⁴

Stowell's statement that the government's draft for war was the main obstacle to recruiting workers is remarkable, since men accounted for only one employee in six. Indeed, his view of the employees was gendered.

With the enormous increase in the number of employees, the Northwestern Knitting Company developed into the largest employer of gainfully employed women in Minnesota. In 1923, Charles L. Pillsbury maintained that the company "to a considerable extent, is looked upon locally as an example and *a leader in the matter of working conditions and labor problems as relating to women* (my italics)." He proudly claimed that the company has "recognized this position, has assumed the implied obligation and has won an enviable reputation in this respect."⁷⁵ While Pillsbury in 1917 underlined that the Northwestern Knitting Company was fully depending on male workers of drafting ages, he gave prominence after the war to the company as an outstanding employer of women.

SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AT WORK

In 1917, the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company engaged William H. Leffingwell, the father of office scientific management, to reorganize the structure of the company. Leffingwell—a disciple of F. W. Taylor—was considered by the directors to be an "office efficiency expert" and he was engaged to investigate the "office methods" for handling the great expansion of the company.⁷⁶ Secretary Van Derlip noted in the minute book: "With the view to such expansion the directors were of the opinion that it will be necessary to effect, in some measure,

⁷⁴Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 241, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁷⁵Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 2, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

⁷⁶Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 6, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

a re-organization of the present executive force in order successfully to meet the conditions which will be presented by such expansion.”⁷⁷

Leffingwell had first published his ideas on scientific management in offices in 1916, and two years later in his book *Scientific Office Management*. He ran a consulting company in Chicago that offered its service to employers who were considering a reorganization of their offices.⁷⁸ His “service” to the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company resulted in a new organization chart of the company that was introduced by December 1, 1917. It presents a telling view of the new organization, presenting both the many different divisions and the power hierarchy of the company.

In January 1919, President Stowell assured the stockholders that “The organization as arranged one year ago for the conduct of the business of this Company has given its best effort to you.”⁷⁹ Half a year earlier, however, the supervisory board decided, after consulting the Leffingwell company once again,⁸⁰ that “control of and responsibility for certain so-called general operations be vested in one person.” This person was Charles L. Pillsbury, who was given “full authority as to and full responsibility for all general operations of each and all divisions of our organization, by which is meant general relationship (not commercial) with the public, and all internal operations of all divisions of our organization as carried on in our general office and warehouse building, including personal and remuneration (except as to division heads), equipment, means and methods.”⁸¹

Even if stated that the board should still conduct the policy of the company and that the new organization “in no way” should “lessen, abrogate nor alter the authority and responsibility of any division

⁷⁷Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 186, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁷⁸Lyn Urwick, *The Golden Book of Management: A Historical Record of the Life and Work of Seventy Pioneers*, London, 1956, pp. 188ff.

⁷⁹Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 242, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁸⁰Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 6, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁸¹Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, August 1, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7. (B), MHS.

head,”⁸² it marked a much more stringent hierarchy of the company. A far-reaching division of labor according to the newly developed ideas of scientific management was established at the plant, and the administration of work was centralized. Several functions were, as Hartman Strom formulates it in the general terms of the time, “extracted from the manufacturing departments and moved to a central location.”⁸³

In December 1918, the directors changed the name of the reorganized company to The Munsingwear Corporation, which was confirmed by the Secretary of State on January 13, 1920.⁸⁴ The main reason for the change of names was to profit from the name of its most successful product and to protect all over the world the established trade name, the Munsing Wear.⁸⁵ Georg Munsing’s return to the company in 1919 as a “research investigator” was most of all symbolic.⁸⁶ His return to the company and the change of names were followed up by the publication of the propaganda booklet *The Success of Well Doing* in 1921. Munsingwear was a symbol of an expanding industrial capitalism in Minneapolis and the Upper Midwest that was run by a few rich men, mostly of New England origin.

THE DIRECTORS

The stockholders owned the company, and most stocks were owned by the company directors, so there is no problem in identifying those in power at the company. Even if a few women owned a limited number of stocks, the stock-owning directors made up a very limited group of men. Only certificates of stock that were signed by the (vice) president and the

⁸²Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, July 31 and August 1, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7. (B), MHS.

⁸³Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 239.

⁸⁴Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation of the Northwestern Knitting Company. December 18, 1918, in Certificates of Agreements, 1889–1933, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁸⁵*Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 6; Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

⁸⁶Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

secretary were, according to the by-laws, valid, and the transfer of stocks was controlled by these men.⁸⁷

In January 1916, the stockholders decided to enforce an amendment to the company by-laws providing for two additional officers: an assistant treasurer and a comptroller.⁸⁸ By then, there were eight officers in the management of the company: President F. M. Stowell, First Vice-President E. J. Couper, Second Vice-President F. Chatfield, Third Vice-President G. E. Routledge, Treasurer C. S. Gold, Secretary John R. Van Derlip, Assistant Treasurer C. E. Mann, and Comptroller C. A. Kirschenstein.

In the fall of 1916, there was a shift of generations in the management, when Cooper and Gold resigned from office. Instead, the board was authorized by the stockholders to sell more shares and to “enter into contract” with Charles L. Pillsbury, who was elected treasurer in 1917.⁸⁹ Pillsbury was also appointed to be chairman of the supervisory board, assisted by the assistant treasurer C. E. Mann. Frank Chatfield was upgraded to become the first vice-president and M. B. Kerr to be the second vice-president.⁹⁰

Clinton Morrison was born in Maine in 1842 but the family moved to Minneapolis in 1855. His father invested in lumber and milling industries and in banking, and he became the first mayor of the city. Clinton Morrison entered the lumbering industry in 1870.⁹¹ He entered the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1887, was elected its president in 1901 and served as such until his death in 1913. In a memorial, his colleagues concluded that “In the course of his lifetime, Mr. Morrison was connected with many enterprises, commercial, financial and public service, and consequently acquired a ripe and varied experience, which was freely at our

⁸⁷Minutes of Special Meeting of Stockholders of the Northwestern Knitting Company, January 15, 1910 and Amendment by July 7, 1913. Secretary’s Record Book 1910–July, 1919, pp. 15 and 73, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 2, Location 148.G.10.10 (F), MHS.

⁸⁸Extracts of the Minutes of the Stockholders’ and Directors’ Meetings, 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁸⁹Extracts of the Minutes of the Stockholders’ and Directors’ Meetings, 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, Location 148.G.11.3 B, MHS.

⁹⁰Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary’s Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 199, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

⁹¹*Minneapolis Journal*, March 11, 1913. F. W. Stowell’s scrapbook, p. 1, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

command, and which has been a very considerable factor in the upbuilding of this business [*sic*].”⁹² He was, among other things, vice-president of the Harvester Company, director of Minneapolis Flour Manufacturing Company, president of the Great Western Elevator Company, president of the North American Telegraph Company, and he was vice-president of the North Star Woolen Mills Company. He was a member of the Minneapolis Commercial Club and the Minneapolis Club. Morrison was a mason, a member of the Church of the Redeemer, and a member of the Lafayette Club. He was a great donator to charity and benevolence, and he donated land for the new Minneapolis Art Museum. In 1915, he became a life member of the Minnesota Historical Society. His daughter Ethel was married to the company secretary Van Derlip. Clinton Morrison himself was married into the Kellogg and Washburn milling families.⁹³

Frederick Moody Stowell was born in Massachusetts in 1870 as the son of a manufacturer and settled in Minneapolis in 1889. He entered the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1895, was elected secretary of the board of directors, and he succeeded Clinton Morrison as president of the company in 1913.⁹⁴ He was a director of the Northwestern National Bank of Minneapolis, and he was a member of the Knight Templars, the Mystic Shrine, the Minneapolis Club, the Minneapolis Athletic Club, and the Lafayette Club of Minneapolis.⁹⁵

Edgar J. Cooper was born in New York State but entered the service of the Northwestern Knitting Company as a clerk in the stockroom in 1887 and advanced to become an accountant. He built the sales organization of the company, and he was a member of the board of directors of Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association and served as its vice-president until 1915, when the board elected him as its president. He chaired its membership committee, and he was engaged in the United States Chamber of Commerce. Cooper was also active in the Minneapolis club. In 1916, he organized a campaign for a building fund

⁹²Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company. *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

⁹³*History of Minneapolis*, Vol. III, Chicago—Minneapolis, 1923, p. 234.

⁹⁴Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company. *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

⁹⁵*History of Minneapolis*, 1923, p. 622.

for the YMCA of Minneapolis, became its president and was involved in the war efforts of the national YMCA. In 1917, he organized the first and the second Liberty loan campaign in Minneapolis.⁹⁶

Charles Lucien Pillsbury was born in Minneapolis in 1872 of parents who came from Maine. He studied engineering and was the city electrician of Minneapolis and served by 1917 as treasurer of the Northwestern Knitting Company. He was a Scottish Rite Mason, member of the Mystic Shrine, Minneapolis Athletic Club, Interlachen Country Club, Minneapolis Golf Club, the Six O’Clock Club, and the Rotary Club of Minneapolis.⁹⁷ In company with W. B. Morris, he was a member of the committee of the Municipal Auditorium of the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association.⁹⁸

William B. Morris, the advertising manager of the Northwestern Knitting Company, was also a New Englander and settled in Minneapolis in 1886. He was employed in the grain business at the Chamber of Commerce before he entered the company in 1896. Morris started as a clerk, “but his innate ability and close application to the thing at hand won for him constant promotion, and when the advertisement department was created in 1897, he was transferred to that department, of which he later became manager.” He became president of the Minneapolis Rotary Club in 1921, and he was “a prominent member” of the Civic and Commerce Association of Minneapolis. He was a trustee of the Andrew Presbyterian Church, and served as president of the Minneapolis Advertising Forum. When the United States entered World War I, he was appointed chairman of “the publicity campaign for Liberty Loan, Red Cross and YMCA drives.” He was a member of the Minneapolis Athletic Club, the Automobile Club, the Minneapolis Golf Club, and the Six O’Clock Club. His biographer claimed that his opinions carried “weight in social as well as business circles” and that he had “attained a position that classes him with the most representative and honored business men of Minneapolis.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶*Munsingwear News*, November 1917, pp. 1ff; *Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association*, Sixth Annual Report, Minneapolis, 1918, p. 8.

⁹⁷*History of Minneapolis*, 1923, p. 590.

⁹⁸*Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association*. Sixth Annual Report. Minneapolis 1918, p. 11.

⁹⁹*History of Minneapolis*, 1923, p. 641.

Moreover, Morris served as one of the directors of the Woman's Occupational Bureau that aimed at intermediating "trained women" for work in Minneapolis during the war.¹⁰⁰

John R. Van Derlip was a descendant of old stock English and Dutch immigrants, born in New York. He settled in Minneapolis in the 1880s, where he practiced law and married one of Clinton Morrison's daughters.¹⁰¹ He acted as counsel for several corporations and served as director in many of them. His "ability as an advocate and as a counsel" placed him in "the front rank among the members of the Minneapolis bar," which he served for 40 years. He entered the board of the directors at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1903, and was elected its secretary in 1913.¹⁰² Van Derlip was chair of the Committee on Industrial Welfare of the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association in 1917–1918 and a member of its Committee on River Development.¹⁰³ Since Van Derlip served as notary public for Hennepin County as late as 1909 and was dealing with by-laws and other legal matters for the Northwestern Knitting Company,¹⁰⁴ he personified the cooperation between State and Capital in reproducing and developing industrial capitalism in Minneapolis. Van Derlip was also a director of the First National Bank in Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Trust Company, and the Minneapolis-Trust Joint Stock Farm Land Bank. He was one of the organizers of the Minneapolis Foundation, a member of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, supported the YMCA, and he served as director of the Orchestral Association of Minneapolis. He was president of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, including the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, which was established in 1911 by the Minneapolis Club as a way

¹⁰⁰ Pamphlet, "Women's Occupational Bureau for Trained Women." Council of National Defense, Women's Committee. January–July, 1918. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Records*, Location 103.K.9.1B, MHS.

¹⁰¹ *History of Minneapolis*, 1923, pp. 219f.

¹⁰² Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

¹⁰³ *Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association*, Sixth Annual Report, Minneapolis, 1918, pp. 10 and 12.

¹⁰⁴ Records of the Business and Management of the Northwestern Knitting Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, incorporated March 1, 1887, pp. 103 and 143, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 2, Location 148.G.10.10 (F), MHS.

of socializing workers and other employees in the city away from trade unions and socialism.¹⁰⁵

Charles Kirsch(en)stein, the comptroller of the Northwestern Knitting Company, was born in Iowa in 1876 as the son of German immigrants, and settled in Minneapolis in 1893 to work in the Great Northern Railroad Company and the Minneapolis Street Railway Company. At the Northwestern Knitting Company he started as a clerk in 1908, advanced to become office manager and auditor in 1915, and was promoted to “the important position of comptroller” in 1918. Kirschstein was a member of the Masons, the Mystic Shrine, and the Minneapolis Athletic Club as well as the Automobile Club of Minneapolis. He was politically affiliated with the Republican Party.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, these mostly Anglo-American gentlemen personified the utmost bourgeoisie of Minneapolis as part of “the social and economic structure that had grown from common Yankee entrepreneurial roots” into the oligarchy that ruled Minneapolis. They were members of the Minneapolis Club that was established in 1883 and renewed by co-optation giving “membership preference to sons and sons-in-law” to ensure a “hereditary leadership of Minneapolis industries.” They “played golf at the Minikahda Club, and they sent their sons to The Blake School and their daughters to Northrup Collegiate School. In many cases, fostered by these close and long-term family associations, the children of these leaders married, creating even tighter family relationship among businesses.”¹⁰⁷ The directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company were part of the top bourgeoisie in Minneapolis and they ranked, according to the *Union Labor Bulletin*, “among the most public spirited and enterprising of our citizens, and the splendid part they have taken in the development of Minneapolis has added not a little to the fame of this Northwestern metropolis.”¹⁰⁸ They successfully ruled a large and complex company that gave big profits to its owners and opened up to a large number of women and some men in the city to earn their living, although one-third of the women lived at or below the subsistence level.

¹⁰⁵ Millikan, 2001, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ *History of Minneapolis*, 1923, pp. 565f; *The City Directories of Minneapolis of 1905*, p. 995, of 1908, p. 881, of 1910, p. 979 and of 1915, p. 1112.

¹⁰⁷ Millikan, 2001, pp. 74f.

¹⁰⁸ April 1915, p. 36.

THE WOMEN AT WORK¹⁰⁹

In the introduction, I noted that 47% of all women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company were born in the United States, identified themselves as Americans and claimed American nationality. Thirty-five percent were born in the United States as daughters of European immigrants and did not claim American nationality, while 18% were born in Europe and had immigrated to the United States by themselves or accompanying their families to the Promised Land. Only 50 immigrant women had been naturalized after immigration and claimed American nationality.¹¹⁰

Most women were blue-collar workers, and 41% of them (923) were born in the United States and claimed American nationality, while 32% (724) were born in the United States but claimed a nationality other than American. Certainly, close to all female white-collar workers (262 out of 272) were born in the United States, but only 156 of them claimed American nationality, i.e. 57% of the white-collar workers were Americans, while 43% claimed another nationality. So, American women were a little underrepresented among blue-collar workers and somewhat, but not overwhelmingly, overrepresented among white-collar workers. Thus, we can't contest Teresa Wolfson's statement in 1926 that American women all over had escaped blue-collar work in the garment industry and monopolized white-collar work.¹¹¹

A great majority of the women who worked for the Northwestern Knitting Company, 2064, were single and they made up 82% of all gainfully employed women at the company (Table 3.2). Their ages spanned between 16 and 55, but the large majority of them were aged 18–30. The employer did not exploit child labor, probably due to the detailed procedure to be permitted to hire children below the age of 16 (Chapter 2) but also due to the advanced technology that made child labor redundant and/or unprofitable (see p. 50, footnote 29). Ninety-seven of them were

¹⁰⁹Due to the available sources I can't say much about the men who worked at the company.

¹¹⁰Certainly, by identifying women by "country of birth" we cannot, as Wendy M. Gordon underlines, "distinguish between recent migrants, who came to the city in the few years preceding" the survey, and "those who had been in residence for many years." See Wendy M. Gordon, *Mill Girls and Strangers: Single Women's Independent Migration in England, Scotland, and the United States*, New York, 2002, p. 7.

¹¹¹Wolfson, 1926, p. 37.

Table 3.2 Country of birth and age of single women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918

<i>Country of birth/Age</i>	16	17	18	19	20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	<i>Total</i>
<i>Austria^a</i>	1		2	2	5	4							14
<i>Denmark</i>	1	2							1	2			6
<i>England</i>		1	1		1		2						5
<i>Finland/ Finnish^b</i>	2	1	2	1	2	9	3						20
<i>France</i>						1							1
<i>Germany</i>	—	1	—	—	1	2	1	1	1	1			8
<i>Norway</i>	2	2	1	6	3	36	21	5	4	2	—	1	83
<i>Poland/ Polish^c</i>	4	—	—	1	1	5							11
<i>Russia/Jewish</i>	1		1			2	1						5
<i>Sweden</i>	1	5	3	7	7	50	35	12	6	4			130
<i>United States I^d</i>	30	47	110	109	97	346	142	63	18	9			971
<i>United States II^e</i>	53	61	76	90	69	292	94	17	7	3	1	1	764
<i>Other countries</i>	2	7	4	2	4	15	6	1	3	2			46
<i>Total</i>	97	127	200	218	190	762	305	99	40	23	1	2	2064

^aOther than "Polish"^bFinland was part of Russia, so Finnish women who were born in "Russia" are included in Finland/Finnish^cPolish means that they were born in Polish areas of Germany, Austria or Russia^dClaiming American nationality^eClaiming a nationality other than American

16 years old, another 127 were 17, and 608 were aged 18–20, so 40% of all single women were aged 16–20, while 8% were older than 30 years of age. A quarter of the single women had passed the “marriage bar” of 25 years of age, when women were expected to be married.

Forty-seven percent of the single women were born in the United States and claimed American nationality, and another 37% were born in the United States as daughters of European immigrants, claiming Swedish (239), German (202), Norwegian (149), French (67), Irish (62), Polish (43), Finnish (27), Danish (23), and Bohemian (16) nationality; 19 other nationalities were only represented by individuals.

A total of 329 single women were immigrants themselves, mostly from Sweden and Norway, while remarkably few single immigrant women came from Germany, France, and from Polish areas.¹¹² German and French emigration to Minnesota had peaked many years ahead of 1918, and young Polish women were probably not allowed to leave their Catholic families in Eastern Europe by themselves.

Strange enough, only five women claimed Jewish nationality and two Italian, so the two national groups that dominated the garment industry in New England were represented by just seven individuals at the company. Since there were about 15,000 Jews in Minneapolis in 1920,¹¹³ Jews might very well have been discriminated against by the employment department of the company or hired by Jewish employers.

Of all women, 330 were married, i.e. 13% of the women at work at the company. Sixty percent of them were in their twenties, nearly one-third in their thirties, and one out of ten had passed their fortieth birthday (Table 3.3). Just four of them had their husband in the army or the navy, so the husbands’ draft for war was just an exceptional reason for married women to work at the company. Rather, their husbands’ poor earnings made them take gainful employment beside their main responsibility for house work.

Surprisingly, American women made up 45% and immigrants 30% of all married women, while only 25% of married women were daughters of immigrants. Most married immigrant women came from Sweden (32), while 15 claimed Polish and 10 Austrian descent, and 9 married

¹¹²For Finland and Poland, see p. 11, footnote 16.

¹¹³Hyman Berman, “The Jews,” in *They Chose Minnesota*, p. 491.

Table 3.3 Country of birth and age of married women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918

<i>Country of birth/Age</i>	<i>17-20</i>	<i>21-25</i>	<i>26-30</i>	<i>31-35</i>	<i>36-40</i>	<i>41-45</i>	<i>46-50</i>	<i>51-55</i>	<i>56-</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Austria</i>		3	2	2	2	1				10
<i>Denmark</i>				3						3
<i>England</i>										-
<i>Finland</i>		3	2	1	2	1				9
<i>France</i>										-
<i>Germany</i>		1	-	4	2	2				9
<i>Norway</i>		7	1						1	9
<i>Poland + Polish</i>		1	5	3	4	2				15
<i>Russia</i>			1							1
<i>Sweden</i>	2	10	6	6	4	3		1		32
<i>United States I</i>	8	46	37	23	20	12	2	1		149
<i>United States II</i>	9	36	18	9	8	1	2	1		84
<i>Other countries</i>		1	1	1	4	1		1		9
<i>Total</i>	19	108	73	52	46	23	4	4	1	330

Note There were also two married women of unknown age

women came from each of Finland, Germany, and Norway. Although the numbers are limited, Polish women stood out, since 15 of the 25 Polish immigrant women were married.

Eighty-eight women were widows (Table 3.4). Forty-five of them had one, two or three children aged from two months to 15 years to provide for, while 17 had no “minors” at home or had adult children who earned their own living and possibly contributed to the family economy as well. Half of the widows were aged 31–40, but almost one-third were younger than this. More than half of them were American women who were born in the United States, one quarter of them were daughters of immigrants, and another quarter had immigrated themselves. It might be worth noting that no widow was born in Germany, while six widows of German nationality but born in the United States earned their living at the company. Since two widows were aged only 20 and most of those who had just one young child were in their 20s, we can assume that their husbands had been killed in the war; one widow even told the surveyor that her husband had “fallen in France.” Mary Young, aged 31, was one of the widows, and she had five children aged from 12 years to 9 months to take care of. She

Table 3.4 Country of birth and age of widows at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918

<i>Country of birth/Age</i>	18-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-	<i>Total</i>
<i>Norway</i>				2		1				3
<i>Sweden</i>			1	2	2	3	1			9
<i>United States I</i>	2	8	4	11	13	2	2	2	2	46
<i>United States II</i>		2	5	4	5	3	1		1	21
<i>Other countries</i>			1	3	1	1		2		8
<i>Total</i>	2	10	11	22	21	10	4	4	3	87

worked as a machine operator but probably not full-time since she did not earn more than \$8.60 per week, which, according to the Women's Committee, was below the subsistence level for one person of \$10.00 per week.¹¹⁴ Since she was 31 years old in 1918 and had been married to an American man, she might have been one of the widows of war.

Twenty-eight women aged 19–53 were divorced, 31 separated,¹¹⁵ and 11 were deserted (Table 3.5). Forty-three percent of them were born in the United States and claimed American nationality, and 14% were born in the United States as daughters of immigrants. Twelve were born in Germany, Norway or Sweden and 8 in other European countries. Thirty-six of these 70 women had children of 14 years of age or younger, whom they had to provide for. One deserted Finnish woman had 6 children aged 4–17 years. Probably the oldest one was a stand-in for her when she worked as a night swaper. She earned \$7.32 per week, i.e. far below a “family wage.” Another woman, 19 years of age herself, also had to provide for her 3-year-old child. Most of the divorced, separated and deserted women did not know what occupation the father of their children had or what he earned, which indicates that they had no contact with the fathers. Some of these women had “no minors” but adult children, who might have supported their mothers and their younger sisters and brothers. Twenty young, single women who lived at home and 11

¹¹⁴ *Women in Industry in Minnesota in 1918*, St. Paul, 1920, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ I presume that separated women had made a family without being formally married.

Table 3.5 Country of birth and age of divorced, separated and/or deserted women working at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918

<i>Country of birth/Age</i>	-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	?	<i>Total</i>
<i>Germany</i>				1	1					2
<i>Norway</i>			2	1	1		1			5
<i>Sweden</i>		1	1	2				1		5
<i>United States I</i>	1	3	11	6	5	2	1	3	1	32
<i>United States II</i>		3	5	5	3					17
<i>Other countries</i>		1	2	1	1	4				9
<i>Total</i>	1	8	21	16	11	6	2	4	1	70

who did not live at home actually acknowledged that they supported their mother. Two supported their father.

A total of 950 single women lived at home, out of which 829 were born in the United States and 121 in Europe (Table 3.6). Of course American women dominated in this group, but significant numbers of Swedish, German, Norwegian, Irish, and Polish women lived with their parents as well. Some Swedish and Norwegian women, born in Europe, lived with their parents, probably since they had come as part of a family emigration. However, more women did not live at home with their parents. Of women born in the United States, 898 had loosened their family ties by moving out of their family homes; Alice Larson from Upsal, Minnesota was one of them. Sixty percent of them were American, but also Swedish, German, and Norwegian women had loosened their family ties in the United States. Another 204 women were born in Europe and some of them had, like the Swedish labor migrant to Minneapolis Evelina Johansdotter,¹¹⁶ certainly emigrated by themselves and loosened the bonds with their families in Europe. It is remarkable that most single Finnish women, born in Finland or the United States, did not live at home, while the great majority of Polish and Irish women did so. It was obviously more difficult for young women to loosen the bonds to Catholic families, and so it was for the small group of Jewish women.

¹¹⁶Månsson, 1930, passim.

Table 3.6 Family-related living by single women of different nationality working at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Living at home</i>		<i>Not living at home</i>	
	<i>Born in the United States</i>	<i>Born in Europe</i>	<i>Born in the United States</i>	<i>Born in Europe</i>
American	449	14	534	7
Swedish	103	35	123	88
Norwegian	60	23	64	60
German	68	3	80	5
Finnish	6	3	19	21
Polish	31	8	9	3
French	19	2	24	1
Irish	32	0	19	2
English	14	1	3	3
Danish	8	2	10	3
Bohemian	11	0	5	1
Austrian	0	7	1	4
Jewish	3	4	0	1
Others	25	19	7	5
Total	829	121	898	204

Lastly, I may note that 646 of the 950 single women who lived at home, contributed to the family economy. Moreover, 9 US-born American women, 10 daughters of immigrants and one woman, who was born in Sweden, lived at home and supported their mothers economically. Another 139 women contributed economically to their families, although they did not live at home, and another 12 US born women and 3 born in Sweden supported their mothers. These women confirm the established view on working class daughters' obligation to their families. Moreover, some young immigrant women who earned more than they needed to survive probably contributed to their family's economy back in Europe by sending money across the ocean.

The single women who supported their families give some backing to Leslie Woodcock Tentler's statement that daughters of working-class families who lived at home usually surrendered all, or almost all, of their earnings to their mothers, who decided how much the young female workers should keep for themselves.¹¹⁷ They also support Alice

¹¹⁷Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900–1930*, New York and Oxford, 1979, p. 74.

Kessler-Harris's claim that both young immigrant girls who came with their families and girls who were born in the new country and brought up with their families there, were "expected to turn over their earnings to the family."¹¹⁸ Maybe they also support John Bodnar's statement that youths of most ethnic groups, especially females, often "received indoctrination in the need to remain loyal to the family and household unit."¹¹⁹

However, 334 single women at the Northwestern Knitting Company lived at home without contributing to their families' economy, so one-third of the single women who lived with their family did not pay their mothers for board and lodging. Some people in Minneapolis and beyond the city might have looked down on them. The contemporary writer Teresa Wolfson claimed that sons and daughters of proletarian as well as non-proletarian families, who left their urban family without leaving the city and without marrying and without supporting their families, were considered to be on the edge of "going bad."¹²⁰ It cannot be determined here how widespread that opinion was in Minneapolis. In fact, Christiane Harzig, Dirk Hoerder and Donna Gabaccia call for more research on working class daughters' relations to their families, and they claim that "[t]he consensus aspect of the family-economy approach [...] needs to be modified by a study of gender and intergenerational hierarchies."¹²¹ I agree, and this study can be seen as a little bit of such research.

The Women's Trade Union League agitator Charlotte Barnum also argued that single women who lived at home, should contribute to the family economy. She argued, though, from a quite different point of view. She demanded that they should contribute to the family economy in order to highlight the full cost of living to the last cent as an argument for better wages, even if that "would take every cent of the wages." She explained: "The pin-money woman and the 14-year-old girl as competitors are the bane of the self-dependent woman and the woman

¹¹⁸Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 125.

¹¹⁹Bodnar, 1985, p. 84.

¹²⁰Wolfson, 1926, p. 43.

¹²¹Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, with Donna Gabaccia, *What is Migration History?* Cambridge, 2009, p. 75.

Table 3.7 Weekly earnings for low-paid women at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918

<i>Marital status</i>	<i>\$7.00 or less</i>	<i>\$7.01–8.00</i>	<i>\$8.01–9.00</i>	<i>\$9.01–10.00</i>
<i>Married women</i>	1	19	46	27
<i>Deserted, divorced and separated women and widows</i>	1	14	27	10
<i>Single women</i>	8	108	287	257
<i>Total</i>	10	141	360	294

supporting others, and are potent causes of low wages for all women.”¹²² From that point of view, we can argue that several working-class families in Minneapolis subsidized the stockholders of the Northwestern Knitting Company by paying parts of the reproductive cost of their daughters’ labor.

Since 805 women at the Northwestern Knitting Company, close to one-third of the total, earned, if not “pin-money,” then an amount at or below the subsistence level of \$10 a week (Table 3.7), we can hardly confirm Maurine Weiner Greenwald’s claim that strikes and collective bargaining were “very common during the war” as a way for women to increase their wages.¹²³ Nor can we confirm the garment labor historian Earl D. Strong’s claim that “the resulting cessation of immigration brought about a marked scarcity of labor and thus created a situation in which the union could force its demands upon the unorganized employers.”¹²⁴

Out of 1102 single women who did not live at home, 930 did not contribute to the family economy, so about half of the women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company had loosened the bonds with their families, were proletarianized into workers, and had to provide for themselves, while others did not totally loosen the bonds with their families in rural Minnesota and beyond. Loosened from their family bonds

¹²² *Life and Labor*, November 1911, p. 346.
¹²³ Greenwald, 1980, p. 39.
¹²⁴ Earl D. Strong, *The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, Grinnell, Iowa, 1940, p. 6.

or not, all women participated, directly or indirectly, in the making of the Munsing Wear that was extremely profitable for the Anglo-American men who owned and ruled the company. Or to put it in more general terms according to Alice Kessler-Harris: “Their extraordinarily low pay and exploitative working conditions enabled employers to speed up the process of capital accumulation.”¹²⁵ The low wages for the majority of the workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear helped to create “*The Success of Well Doing*.”

¹²⁵Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*, Urbana and Chicago, 2007, p. 24.



CHAPTER 4

Divided Work—Women and Men at Work for the Company

INTRODUCTION TO WORK

The Northwestern Knitting Company did not exploit the many private labor agencies of Minneapolis to get employees but organized their own employment agency. An applicant was probably met by the employment manager Frances Little of the employment department. It sounds comforting that she, as the author of the booklet *Success of Well Doing* lets us know, extended “every courtesy to those waiting their turn to be interviewed.” Unfortunately, there is no information about who conducted these interviews other than that the supervisory board itself interviewed applicants for top- and mid-level positions as managers. For instance, on April 19, 1918, the board decided that manager Morris could employ Maurice Flagg “as his assistant” and that the assistant should be paid \$3,000.00 a year.¹ In spite of the nice environment, the applicants, some of whom did not speak English very well, were probably not very relaxed while waiting for a member of the staff to question them.²

¹ See for instance Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 16 and 19, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.137 (B), MHS.

² In 1916, the Young Women’s Christian Association of the North Central Field claimed that close to 42,000 foreign-born white women in Minnesota were “unable to speak English.” Statistics concerning the North Central Field Committee of the National Board, Young Women’s Christian Association for 1916, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.K.7.9 (B), MHS.

According to the booklet, Frances Little guided all applicants through the different departments “in order that each worker may be placed in the department to which he or she [was] best adapted.” The applicants could express their wishes to be placed in a certain department, but the employing staff definitely decided by themselves where an approved applicant was “best adapted” and should be put to work for the company. The reader of the booklet, however, was not introduced to this procedure but could instead enjoy, as it was formulated in the booklet, a “little journey through the Home of Munsingwear.”³ For sure, the booklet was intended to inspire any woman and man to apply for work in the plant, but, unintentionally, it also helps us to analyze the work process and the labor relations at the company.

THE MAKING OF MUNSING WEAR

The yarn was not spun in the Northwestern Knitting Company but was bought and brought into the receiving room by some of the men in the traffic department. In 1917, Charles L. Pillsbury listed a foreman, an assistant foreman, an auto driver, a case maker and two truckers aged between 21 and 31 among the men employed in the traffic department that he wanted to release from the draft for war.⁴ Certainly, there were several more men of higher ages and perhaps some younger men as well. No woman was registered as taking part in transportation in 1918, and there was no woman on the payroll of 1920 who took part in the transportation of goods at the company. Transportation was a work for men.

The men in the traffic department unloaded the yarn that was “carefully weighted and subjected to delicate tests,” because the managers did not want to risk the quality of the Munsing Wear. In 1917, a foreman supervised five truckers and one man who baled the yarn, which was brought to the mill “in huge packing boxes, each as spick and span inside as a confectioner’s gift box, and fully as tempting,” as the company annalist expressed it. No woman was involved in that “responsible” work, which instead, according to director Pillsbury, was work that demanded “men and trained men.” These men also brought the yarn

³ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 11.

⁴ Letter from Charles Pillsbury to John S. Pardee, June 13, 1917, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Main files, Location 103.L.8.1B, Box 6. F 97, MHS.

into the yarn winding department and transported the boxed garments away from the plant.

In 1920, the traffic work was headed by a foreman, while one receiving clerk, one assistant receiving clerk, and two clerks kept record of the yarn that was delivered to the mill. Two sorters, two balers, and one stockman took care of the yarn and the garments, which were transported by ten truckers. Seven elevator men transported both material and people up and down in the huge building. Further, a very low-paid yardman was connected to the traffic department. Only the foreman, the receiving clerk and the head trucker were paid more than \$25.00 per week in 1920, so men's work was not generally paid much better than most women's work.

In the yarn winding department, "where the Bobbins Whir,"⁵ the work was registered by a few stock clerks. In 1917, there were 12 male clerks, whom director Pillsbury tried to keep from being drafted for war. In 1920, just two women were registered as clerks in the department. They, however, earned less than most men there did,⁶ so gender certainly mattered for earning one's living as a clerk in the yarn winding department. The daily work of these women was not transferred to an office but remained closely connected to the blue-collar workers, which indicates that their class location was pretty close to working class.

In 1920, however, five out of eleven truckers in the department were women, so gender did not matter exclusively for transportation work in the plant. The truckers were paid individually but at fixed rates by the hour.⁷ One woman was hired as an oiler, and a male foreman had been replaced by a forelady, and another one was hired as inspector in the department. It seems as if trucking and oiling had changed their gender character during the war, when so many young men had been drafted for war.

All work with the yarn was women's work. In 1918, 16 young women skined the yarn before it was spooled on the bobbins. Only one of them was born in Europe and just one other was a daughter of American

⁵ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 10.

⁶ Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, The Munsingwear Inc. June 1920, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

⁷ Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

parents, so nearly all of the skeiners were daughters of immigrants. On average, they earned between \$10 and \$11. Since their weekly earnings were even sums, we can conclude that they were paid by the hour, the day, or the week. Their work was speeded up in other ways than by piecework.

The spoolers, who put the yarn on spindles on the winding machines, were also in general young daughters of immigrants, mostly of German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Polish descent. The wages of the spoolers varied between \$9.00 and \$12.50, but most of them earned \$10.00 or \$10.50 a week, so the spoolers were also paid by the hour, and their work speed was determined by the speed of the machines.

Thirty-seven women were employed to cone the yarn over a tension bar onto bobbins. Most of them were aged either 16 or 17, and they were also daughters of immigrants, mostly of Swedish, Norwegian, and German descent, although 10 of them were daughters of Polish or Russian Jewish immigrants. They were also paid by time, but they were among the lowest paid of all blue-collar workers at the company in 1918. Most of them earned the official subsistence level of \$10 a week or less, so coning was a hard way for young women to earn their living in Minneapolis.

One woman cared for about 20 bobbins at a time, since the winding machines were “so automatic” that they could “go on with the work until every bobbin [was] complete.” The only break happened when the yarn was broken. Then the young women had to tie the ends together, an operation they did “so quickly that it seems like magic,” the official company annalist maintained. It was not the women but those who controlled the machines that decided the work speed, which explains why these women could be paid by the hour and not by piece rate. Indeed, the women who worked in the yarn winding department were “appendixes” to the machines.

The annalist tried to convince the readers of the booklet that the tying of broken yarn was an “interesting task.” I doubt that it was. Instead, the work must have been so monotonous and boring that s/he had to try to convince any applicant that it was an interesting job. But, indeed, I do agree with the annalist that it must have been “interesting to see how quickly the girls learn[ed] to handle this work.”⁸ When the author

⁸ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 11.

stated that “their interest [was] held by the fascination of the work,” the word “their” can in reality not have alluded to the young working women but to visitors, who just made a short stop in the yarn winding department on their “little journey through the Home of Munsingwear” without having to earn their living in it day in and day out. The women themselves probably did not like the work, which might be the main reason why there were so few American women working there and why young daughters of immigrants left it as soon as possible for work in other departments or for another employer. Due to its monotony, this part of the work in the Munsingwear Home was coded by class as well as gender and ethnicity, and in 1918 it was low-paid work for daughters of immigrants. But changes were about to happen.

In 1920, the 115 skeiners, spoolers, and coners of 1918 had been replaced by 63 female “power winding machine operators,” who earned between \$13 and \$23 a week, and one male machine operator who earned more than \$25 a week.⁹ Obviously, the winding of the yarn had become more standardized into one task and sophisticated in terms of technology, and the wages were more diversified in 1920 than in 1918. Since the earnings of the operators of the winding machines were odd and differed between the two fortnights in June 1920, although the working time was the same, the wages were based on individual performance. These machine operators seem to have been less of an appendix to the machine than their sisters in 1918 were. Still, gender mattered, since just one man operated winding machines and earned considerably more than the women did.

From the yarn winding department the bobbins were brought by male truckers over to three knitting departments. The knitters had to place the spindles on the knitting machines and feed the yarn through stop motions to the knitting needles. Every woman had to handle a number of machines “quite efficiently.” The company annalist did not say how many, but Charles L. Pillsbury noticed nearly 600 knitting machines at the plant in 1923. All of them were of “the latest types,” and the manager thought that any lay onlooker would be puzzled by “[t]he many whirling, automatic and almost human knitting

⁹Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., 1920, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.



Fig. 4.1 Women at knitting machines 1920. Photographer: C. J. Hibbard. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

machines.”¹⁰ Since 79 women operated knitting machines in 1920, every woman operated on average 6–7 machines, if there were nearly 600 machines in 1920 as well. Their chief task was to inspect the knitwear as it was being knit, and to tie broken yarn. The annalist admits that “[k]een eyes and skillful fingers” were required for the work, but “in case any repairing or adjustment [of a machine needed] to be done, [a male] ‘adjuster’ [was] called” to get the machine ready for women’s work again (Fig. 4.1).¹¹

In 1918, the knitting women were older and more experienced than those who skeined, coned, or spooled the yarn. Most of them were aged 18–25, but one had reached the advanced age of 48.

¹⁰ Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, pp. 2–3.

¹¹ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 15.

There was quite a different ethnic composition of the women at the knitting machines than in the yarn winding department. Seventy-five percent were born of American parents in the United States, while just 11% were daughters of immigrants, which can be compared to 81% in the yarn winding department. Only 12 immigrant women were trusted to operate a knitting machine. It was a work for American women, and there was obviously no career to advance from the winding department into knitting.

The wages for the knitting women varied much more than for the women in the yarn winding department in 1918. The highest wages, \$18 or more, were paid to American women. Their earnings were individual and based on piece work. Wages below \$18 were instead fixed and thus based on time. If we look away from the top wages for American women, there was no correlation between ethnicity and wages for operating the knitting machines. Some immigrant women earned between \$14 and \$16 each a week, and several American women were among those who earned just \$8–\$10. Rather, there was a distinct correlation between age and wage, since most of the youngest women, possibly learners, earned between \$7 and \$9 only and few of those who were older than 19 earned less than \$10 a week. Thus, ethnicity mattered for the possibility of getting a pretty well-paid job in the knitting departments, while age and experience mattered for the chances of earning a fair living from operating the knitting machines.

It is not that easy to explain why American women were considered to be “best adapted” to operate the knitting machines. Even if it might have been, as the company annalist claimed, “most interesting to watch” the operation of the knitting machines, the description does not convince us that it was a very skilled job that immigrant women or their daughters could not perform. “The girl operators,” s/he said, “at a casual glance, would seem to be standing by like monitors at the head of their classes, watching them knit, knit, knit automatically, with absolute precision and with almost human intelligence.” Maybe that is why just one woman out of six of Swedish descent stayed as a knitter until 1920?

On the other hand, supervisor Lowry told the company directors in 1920 that “the average inexperienced girl would not be able to ‘help herself’ inside of two months; and that at least six months were required to bring a girl up to normal efficiency; that to make a really

good knitter required a considerably longer period.”¹² Knitting was a most trustful work that American women had more access to than immigrants and their daughters, but they were only trusted to operate the knitting machines, not to serve them. In 1918, no woman was called an “adjuster,” so only men were considered to be able to adjust the machines. In 1920, twenty-five men were hired for work in the three knitting departments, most of them fairly well paid: three assistant foremen, twelve machine adjusters, and three oilers. Moreover, one knitwear weigher, one trucker, one “handy man,” three cleaners, one elevator operator, and a couple of low-paid boys of 16 years of age or “under 21” also worked in the knitting departments in 1920.¹³ Indeed, additional to the ethnic division of knitting work, there was a gendered one. Men supervised female machine operators, adjusted the machines that the women operated, and did some service work around the knitting. Some women inspected the garments that other women made.

In the 1910s, women were by law forbidden to work at night in mills and factories in Minnesota. Still, some women worked at night at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Alice Larson, whom we met in the introduction, “worked on the knitting machine and made underwear for the soldiers [...] worked night shift because it paid more”; in 1918, she earned \$20.90, which was a pretty decent income. Maybe the labor laws were set aside due to the involvement of the company in the war effort? On the other hand, night work did not end when the war was over. In 1919, the *Munsingwear News* announced that “Members of Department B night force will miss Florence Burg, who was transferred on days after being with them for some time.” Instead, “Anna Nelson and Josephine Macauley have both entered Department B night force.”¹⁴ The magazine also reported sickness and/or vacation of some employees from “Night Work.”¹⁵ Indeed, it looks as if the employer broke the labor legislation of Minnesota regarding women’s work at night both during and after the war.

¹²Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1920, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹³Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, June 1920, *Munsingwear Inc.*, pp. 3–5 (1–50), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

¹⁴*Munsingwear News*, March 1919, p. 13.

¹⁵*Munsingwear News*, April 1919, p. 17.

The knitted goods were brought from the knitting departments into the bleaching room, where the workers had to “remove the wax and foreign matter from the cotton yarns and from the fabric, and to brighten the knitwear and give it that nice white appearance.” First, however, the knitted garment had to be brushed and extracted in machines. In 1920, only men were involved in those processes as foremen, stock tenders, oilers, knitwear folding machine operators, knitwear brush machine operators, extracting machine operators, and washing machine operators.¹⁶

The first stage of the bleaching was to boil the knitwear in chemicalized water in huge cauldrons. Then, the knitwear was put through a washing process, and the cotton, but not the worsted, knitwear was put into chlorine to be bleached. The annalist highlighted that it might have been “interesting to learn” that the same kind of chlorine was the base for the gases, “which the Germans used with such deadly effect on the Allies!”¹⁷ Indeed, that was interesting to learn!

The bleaching operation was considered to require a “most skillful handling.” According to the annalist, the work “must be done by men who have a thorough understanding of the process.” There were two foremen, three assistant foremen, twelve machine operators, one machine adjuster, three stock tenders, and one trucker registered for work in the laundry department among the young men of drafting age in 1917. In 1920, one assistant foreman, one repairman, one “handy man,” two boilers, two water softener attendants, seventeen bleach machine operators, and one washing machine operator worked there. Gender mattered for work in the laundry department, and the men who were trusted to work in the bleaching room belonged to the group of “trained men,” who were so necessary for the work that Charles L. Pillsbury asked that they should be exempted from the draft.

The statement that laundry was skilled work that only men could perform is remarkable. Traditionally, more women than men did the washing of textiles, including bleaching them, so women certainly had “a thorough understanding of the process.” Still, it was turned into men’s

¹⁶Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, pp. 3–5 (1–50), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

¹⁷*The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 17.

work in the company, where it had become a subject for mechanization and scientific analysis, and hence upgraded and turned into a men's task.¹⁸

After bleaching, the knitwear was washed once again, put into a bluing solution, and taken through a wringer. The laundry work was finished in drying machines in the drying room, which differed distinctly from the other units of the laundry department. The assistant foreman, who supervised men's tending of the machines, was better paid than the forewomen, who supervised other women's handling of the fabric. In 1920, a female clerk earned \$15, while five stock tenders earned between \$23 and \$30 for one week's work. Two male truckers and a male repairman also worked in the laundry department, while seventeen women operated machines for drying, rolling up, banding, and folding the bleached garment. So, altogether both men and women worked in the laundry department, but there was a distinct gender division of labor and significant gender differences in wages in favor of men's work.

The operation of machines was not monopolized by men. In 1918, 19 women were employed as cleaners in the D-department. Since some of them were hired as garment cleaners in 1920, cleaning in 1918 did not mean cleaning rooms but garments. This was a job for two kinds of American women, one group of rather well-paid women of advanced ages (28–48 years) and another group of low-paid women aged 16–18. Most of the young women were paid as little as \$7.76 a week, so they were probably learners and paid a fixed sum of money.

After having been dried, the knitwear was brought into "an exceptionally splendid workroom," the Fleecing Room, where the windows were both large and numerous, the ceilings were 16 feet high, and there was "no crowding." The knitwear was fed over very massive cylinders, which revolved in the same direction as the knitwear was fed, while smaller cylinders on the bigger ones revolved in the opposite direction. They were covered with "millions of sharp needle points," which raised "fleeces," or "naps," in the surface of the knitwear. The cloth was put on an automatic turning machine, which turned the knitwear right side out.

¹⁸Ulla Rosén, "A Rational Solution to the Laundry Issue': Policy and Research for Day to Day Life in the Welfare State," in Per Lundin, Niklas Stenlås, and John Gribbe (eds.), *Science for Welfare and Warfare: Technology and State Initiative in Cold War Sweden*, Sagamore Beach, 2010; Ulla Rosén, *A Clean Century: How Elektrolux-Wascator AB Washed the World: 1902–2002*, Ljungby, 2002.

Thereafter it was put on an automatic folding machine and folded into “proper widths and lengths for cutting.”¹⁹

“Men only are employed in this work,” said the annalist without explaining why. S/he did not even state that the work needed “skill.” In an illustrative photo a man, dressed in a white shirt and a tie, is sitting on a chair beside a machine, controlling its motions. Symbolically, the man was folding his arms instead of the fabrics, and altogether the photo illustrates that this is not manual work, just work for machine-supervising men. In 1920, three men were reported as knitwear folding machine operators and two as brushing machine operators. In 1918, however, three women were reported as folding machine operators, so possibly women performed men’s work during the war. Still, five women and one man operated drying machines, five women operated rolling-up machines, and two women operated banding machines two years later.²⁰

After having been fleeced and folded, the knitwear was transported to the garment cutting department, where 40,000–50,000 yards of it were cut up daily into several styles and sizes of Munsing Wear. The knitwear came into the department in tubular form, folded flat into piles. First, markers put the knitwear upon tables that were specially designed for marking, and then they selected “the proper patterns and mark(ed) the places to be cut, and very carefully cut through the marks.” Due to the elasticity of the knitwear, “only a patient and skilled hand” could cut the garment precisely for use in Munsing Wear.²¹

In 1920, supervisor Lynde stated that it required from 2½ to 3 months to become “a normally efficient cutter”, but the efficiency would “be greatly increased during the fourth, fifth and six months.”²² By then, the supervisor had put a lot of energy into making cutting more efficient. In the report to the stockholders, President Stowell announced a “very pleasing feature of our statistics” regarding “our percentage of illegitimate waste in our cutting rooms.” He proudly announced that this was “a direct profit” and he was quite sure that “it will be gratifying

¹⁹ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 19.

²⁰ Minimum Wage Commission, Pay Roll Reports, June 1920, Munsingwear Inc., p. 7 (1–50), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

²¹ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 21.

²² Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1920, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

to every stockholder.”²³ Certainly, no manager told the workers about the “very pleasing feature” of the company statistics that was based on their work.

Cutting the fabrics was women’s work. In 1918, 88 women marked the garments, while no fewer than 123 women were laying up fabric two years later. Since nine out of twelve Swedish markers of 1918 did so in 1920, I presume that marking and laying up knitwear were the same task. In 1920, 22 women earned more than \$25 a week for laying up fabric, so their work was pretty well paid in comparison to most women’s work at the company.²⁴ A few of them probably marked “the places for buttons and buttonholes,” which often was a specialized operation.²⁵

The skill in the cutting process consisted of “placing the pattern economically on the cloth so that the maximum number of garments can be cut from a piece of goods.” The nap of the goods had to run in the same direction, so good knowledge of the fabric and careful observation of the goods was a precondition for successful work. “Matching stripes for pockets and collars and fronts” was an especially important operation.²⁶

At the Northwestern Knitting Company, marking and laying up fabrics was a job for young American women and daughters of immigrants, even if one of the oldest workers at the company in 1918 was a 56-year-old marker. She and a Finnish woman of 37 were exceptions by being older than 25. Four girls were only 16 years old and were probably apprentices, while the great majority of the women were aged between 18 and 25.

There was a great variety of wages for marking, but the medium wage in 1918 was \$12 a week. In 1920, 28 women earned “over \$25.00 per week” and another 28 between \$20 and \$25 for laying up fabric, so marking/laying up knitwear was a comparatively well-paid operation. Still, American women did not monopolize it totally. In 1918, for

²³President’s report to stock-holders, January 6, 1920, p. 3, Secretary’s Record Book, Dec. 1919–December 1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

²⁴The Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, pp. 9–11 (1–59), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

²⁵Bryner, 1916, p. 45.

²⁶Bryner, 1916, p. 33.



Fig. 4.2 Women sewing garments, 1920. Photographer: C. J. Hibbard. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

instance, three immigrant daughters were paid the highest earnings. Skill mattered more than ethnicity (Fig. 4.2).

In 1920, some men were employed for work in the cutting departments. Supervisor Lynde was put on the payroll for office employees, indicating a significant social distance to the workers. The daily work was headed by an assistant foreman, but three stock clerks, two clerks, ten knit-wear weighers, two truckers and two men who performed “odd work” also worked in the department. Two men worked as hand pattern cutters. They might have been a remnant of older days, but they were certainly no traditional “aristocrats” of the sweatshop garment industry, since they earned less than female cutters. Another two men operated power cutting machines, but they made up a minority of these machine operators.

Women were obviously considered to be more patient than men at cutting garments. In 1918, no fewer than 270 women were employed just for cutting the fabrics. There was a great variety in earnings, which

indicates a great variety of tasks. Several pieces of garments had to be cut before they were put together into finished garments. For instance, three young women, aged 16–17, specialized in cutting cuffs. Since very young and inexperienced women were put to cut the cuffs, not all cutting was considered to be very skilled work. Still, the annalist maintained that the women's use of patterns, cutters, and shears "would put many a tailor to shame," without noting that cutters and tailors had been separated in the US garment industry several decades earlier.

Most cutting women were aged 21–25 (37%), but several were between 26 and 30 years of age (20%), and another 13% had even passed their thirtieth birthday. Only two women were younger than 18, so, with the exception of cutting cuffs, quite a lot of experience was demanded for cutting the fabric. Still, just 2 out of 59 cutters of Swedish descent in 1918 worked as cutters in June 1920. Another 18 stayed in the employ of the company but they performed other kinds of work such as mending, laying up fabric, operating power sewing or pressing machines, cleaning garments, teaching, or even clerical work. So, cutting was not a lifelong career in making Munsing Wear, but it could open up other kinds of work at the plant.

American-born women were not put to cut the fabric more often than others. On the contrary. Out of 270 cutting women in 1918, just 36% were American, while 22 were of Swedish, 14 of Norwegian, and another 14% of German descent, and another 14 nationalities were represented in smaller numbers. Thus, American women were significantly under-represented among the cutting women, and, generally, they did not earn more than immigrant women and daughters of immigrants. In particular, daughters of immigrants were not barred from cutting, so skill mattered, and no national group monopolized the skilled work. In contrast to previous research, I would say that immigrant women and the daughters of immigrants were no less successful than their American sisters in handling the shears and making pieces for a garment. Teaching, though, was a matter for American women, although five of the twelve teachers had Swedish names without being registered as Swedish, which implies that their Swedish origin was three or more generations back in time and they could speak English.

In a way, the cutting women could be satisfied with their work conditions. According to the annalist, the managers tried to make it extra comfortable for these women: "Every effort is put forth to bring about perfection in equipment, and in lighting, and other comfort-producing

features.” Certainly, daylight penetrated the large windows of the cutting departments, because “accuracy of workmanship” was so necessary in cutting the garments.²⁷ The women were provided with good working conditions in order to perform good work. In return, they had to work under heavy pressure for their earnings.

No fewer than 12 women were employed to teach new workers to lay up the knitwear and/or to cut garments. Only women were trusted to perform that transference of skill. The number of female cutters had, however, decreased significantly from 270 women in 1918 to 42 cutters in 1920. Moreover, by then no more than 6 women handled shears by hand, while 34 women and 2 men operated power cutting machines. Something dramatic had happened in cutting garments at the Northwestern Knitting Company.

In 1916, Edna Bryner highlighted the ongoing mechanization of cutting garments in general, and she claimed that the efficiency of mechanical cutting was eight times higher than with manual cutting.²⁸ Indeed, cutting was about to be mechanized at Munsingwear as well. In 1920, its efficiency was evidenced by supervisor Lynde, who stated to the board of supervisors that “under the old method of hand cutting, it was possible to turn out about 4,000 dozen per day on two floors, while with the new method of power cutting it would probably be possible, when the work was thoroughly organized, to turn out about 5,000 dozen per day on one floor without the use of a night force.”²⁹

Efficiency at work was, however, not only a matter of mechanization but also a matter of speeding up the work process, and the intensification of work was a matter of concern for the company directors. In 1918, they noted that efficiency engineer Shanley was “intensively conducting [. . .] an efficiency survey [. . .] in the knitting and winding departments.”³⁰ Shanley had been working for the company as “the representative of a firm of efficiency engineers of Chicago” since the beginning of 1916. In November 1917, company president Stowell announced officially that engineer Shanley had “become a permanent member of

²⁷ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, pp. 20f.

²⁸ Bryner, 1916, p. 33.

²⁹ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1920, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

³⁰ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 27, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box. 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

our organization” and that he, so far, had done his work “quietly, effectively, and in a dignified and gentlemanly way.” Stowell underlined that Shanley’s work had resulted in “much good” for “all of us,” because it had “promoted the interests of employees [*sic*] as well as the interests of the company.” He even claimed to know that Shanley’s work had been “appreciated by every one [*sic*] in the institution,” so the directors had better take him in their full employ instead of buying his labor from the Chicago company. Stowell summarized: “I know you will all join me in a feeling of satisfaction in the thought that his future relation with us will be more intimate and more enduring.” He even felt “very confident” that all employees would like to join him “in extending a hearty welcome to engineer Shanley as a member of ‘the Munsingwear Family’.”³¹

Shanley was employed as an efficiency and method engineer and, as such, he was in charge of the department of efficiency and methods, which seems to have been a new department of the reorganization chart of December 1, 1917. Like the other division and department managers, Shanley had to “report to, and will hold frequent, regular, and special conferences with the supervisory board.”³² His class location was far away from that of the workers.

Indeed, engineer Shanley was busy. In July 1918, he proposed to the supervisory board to employ an assistant efficiency engineer. He thought a good one could be obtained for an annual salary of between \$2500 and \$3000 and argued that such an assistant would be profitable, since he himself would no longer “need to be hampered individually and tied down to desk detail as he has been of late and for some time past.” Even if he had several selfish reasons to obtain an assistant—he got rid of the less interesting tasks and enjoyed higher prestige—the proposal could be taken as a sign of increasing scientific management. The board approved his proposal.³³ Obviously, engineer Shanley and his assistant were successful in their efforts to please the directors and the stockholders, since a representative from a Wisconsin underwear mill was visiting Munsingwear “to learn our time study principles.”³⁴

³¹ *Munsingwear News*, November 1917, p. 11.

³² *Munsingwear News*, March 1918, p. 11.

³³ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, July 31, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

³⁴ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, January 21, 1921, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

Piece-rate payment seems to have been the norm for cutting, and the workers' performance was measured at the end of each day. A man weighed both the garments and the clippings on automatic scales: "It is by this means that each operator can be accredited for quantity and efficiency," the annalist concluded,³⁵ and the supervisors might prevent the women from being wasteful with the knitted fabric. Although the annalist did not mention it, things could go wrong in the cutting department, so 16 menders were employed there in 1920.

Three truckers transferred the garment from the cutting departments to the sewing departments, but transportation of the garment within the sewing departments seems to have been a busy thing. No fewer than 55 truckers—all but one were men—transported fabrics and garments in these departments in 1920. They earned between \$29 and \$43 for two weeks' work, so truckers were not very well paid compared to, for instance, women who operated power sewing machines; several of these women earned more than \$50 for the same amount of working time. The registration of the work, however, does not seem to have involved too much labor. Just one well-paid male and one low-paid female clerk were employed for that task.

In 1918, no fewer than 1112 women operated sewing machines. That number should be repeated: 1112 women sewed garments in the Northwestern Knitting Company. Of these, 197 were of Swedish origin, and daughters of German, Norwegian, Polish, and Danish descent made up other clusters in the sewing departments. There was a great variety of ages, wages, and ethnic background. American women did not monopolize the better-paid tasks, so skill mattered more than ethnicity.

The company annalist admired the women who worked so intensively at the sewing machines. At the sight of "the wondrously dexterous fingers of the girls" s/he was reminded of "a pianist as they so skillfully play in and out, playing on the soft fabrics whirled together and joined in one by the many threaded sewing machines."³⁶ Certainly, this was mostly an ideological statement. In contrast to the official declaration of the annalist, supervisor Niles complained to the directors about the productivity of the sewing women. He "estimated an increase in output of about 40%

³⁵ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, pp. 20f.

³⁶ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 23.

with the same number of machines and operators, if all operators in his department were as proficient as his most experienced 20%.”³⁷

There were at least two basic operations involved in working a sewing machine: running it and handling the material. In 1916, Edna Bryner explored the process:

The beginner is instructed first in the running of the machine, starting, stopping, and controlling the power, and in threading the needle quickly. She is then taught to handle materials in easy seaming operations and is transferred from these to other operations on which workers are needed.³⁸

Bryner explained that “the beginner’s mind was focused on learning to run the machine” during the first week or so. The operator had to know how to start and to stop

the power at exactly the right time to get the machine over the proper amount of ground [. . .] and the essential need is for the learner to acquire such a coordination of hand and eye that this control will become an automatic matter.

Then, the worker had to focus on the material, which was “the truly difficult part of the operation,” since the material was “flexible in any direction.” Thus, the feeder was “not a mere feeder,” because the sewing machine operator still had to have a “high degree of dexterity.”³⁹ Bryner added that employers in general claimed that “a girl who has never operated a machine can learn an easy operation well enough in four weeks to be employed at regular piece rate.” Supervisor Niles at the Northwestern Knitting Company, on the other hand, told the directors that “average operators on the simpler work, such as cuff-edging, could be developed in from two to three months,” while it usually took up to six or eight months to get “a steady gain in speed and efficiency.” It took much the same time to learn to become a normal flatlock operator.⁴⁰

³⁷Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1920, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

³⁸Bryner, 1916, pp. 100f.

³⁹Bryner, 1916, p. 121.

⁴⁰Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1920, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

Even if it was not that difficult to learn how to handle a sewing machine, the operator had to speed up the work in order to earn her living, although the annalist did not say anything about the speed of work. So, the minimum of four weeks' learning did not imply good earnings. In fact, the sewing machine operator required "a much longer time to become a first-class worker on a single operation." Bryner added that it might take "from one to two years" to acquire the necessary skills of a group of operations so that the operator could easily transfer from one operation to another.⁴¹

Now and then the women were monitored in their work not only by foremen and forewomen but also by one specific man. The 23-year-old time study man Kenneth Tyler not only monitored their operational motions but perhaps also caused a cut in their wages by causing a decrease of the piece rate as well. The women had to work harder to earn the same money as before the decrease. The young time study man had obviously learnt from engineer Shanley or Dr. Leiserson (above p. 48) that rates for piecework could be lowered when workers had trained themselves to produce more and more in a given time.

The intensification of work certainly had other effects for the operators than the risk of decreasing wages. In general, speeding up the work at sewing machines caused "an inevitable rise in the frequency of the needle striking the finger instead of the cloth." Usually the needle went "practically through the finger," and it often even broke "into one or more fragments upon striking the bone." Frequently, such accidents resulted in infected wounds.⁴² The workers were affected badly, as the Swedish migrant worker Evelina Johansdotter experienced in Minneapolis at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Some [...] were in such a bad way that they came near to fainting and often had to get a doctor to remove the bits of needle from their fingers [... It was] quite common that especially the beginners sewed over their fingers, very likely because of the speed of the machines which were electrically powered. (my translation)⁴³

⁴¹Bryner, 1916, p. 101.

⁴²Jack Hardy, *The Clothing Workers: A Study of the Conditions and Struggles in the Needle Trades*, New York, 1935, p. 209.

⁴³Månsson, 1930, p. 92.

Being overstrained, if only for part of a second, could not only result in pain but in lower earnings too. Evelina nevertheless escaped any serious consequences of her injury:

Only once did I sew over my finger so that the needle broke into several pieces. I stayed calm, however, quickly wrapped my finger tightly into a handkerchief, put in a new needle, and continued sewing as if nothing had happened. It was not until lunch break that I could examine my finger—luckily I discovered no pieces of needle in it, but I was seriously injured and *I was very much hindered during the time when I had to keep it wrapped.* (my translation and my italics)⁴⁴

One reason for injuries at work was, according to a YWCA surveyor in Minneapolis, poor consumption of food that often increased “the hazards of industrial accidents and diseases.”⁴⁵ Since so many women at the Northwestern Knitting Company earned below the official subsistence level, we can assume that they did not eat enough to keep their work capacity at its peak. I will return to that in Chapter 7. Labor turnover was significant, since 16 sewing women ended their employment in the middle of June 1920, while 45 new women simultaneously were employed for sewing.

The skill that the women eventually developed in the sewing departments did not, however, involve increased training for other tasks, and it certainly did not, as Woodcock Tentler maintains, “provide women with passports to more interesting, complex, and better-paid employment.” Certainly, a few sewing women could be appointed as supervisors or teachers, but in general a foreman had no incentive at all to move an efficient woman to another task. And, indeed, at the Northwestern Knitting Company power sewing machine operators either stayed at their machines or left the company. Out of 187 female sewing machine operators of Swedish descent at the company in 1918 only 69 were still in the employ of the company two years later. The great majority of them still operated power sewing machines, while a few had been promoted

⁴⁴Månsson, 1930, p. 92.

⁴⁵Lane, “Women and Girls Employed Outside of Home,” p. 88, Survey 1919, Vol. 2. Special Studies, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

to garment inspectors, were laying up fabric, operated another kind of power machines, or mended, cleaned, or boxed the garments. Moreover, once a woman had trained herself to the top speed and maximum wage, there was not very much in the work process itself to hold the woman's interest in the work.⁴⁶ The employers, instead, had to provide women trained for monotonous and tedious tasks with other kinds of incentives for work that will be analyzed in Chapter 6.

Also sewing itself was an object for subdivision of work. The annalist paid extra attention to two of the subdivided sewing operations in the making of Munsing Wear: making buttonholes and sewing on the buttons. Both operations were mechanized at the end of the nineteenth century and "greatly increased the output and simplified the task of the garment worker."⁴⁷ Jensen estimates that "the use of machine-made buttonholes instead of hand-sewn buttonholes could reduce labor time as much as 95–96% in buttonhole making, and 88–91% in buttonhole cutting."⁴⁸ To make a buttonhole the woman first had "to set the point where the buttonhole should be made under the foot of the buttonhole machine." Then she had to press her foot on a lever of the machine to start it sewing all around where the buttonhole was to be made. A little sharp knife automatically plunged down exactly between the two rows of stitching, cutting the threads of the knitwear "so clean and close to the stitches that it is difficult to believe that the buttonhole was not really made around an opening."⁴⁹

Provided with the newly made buttonholes, the garments were sent to the women who operated the button sewing machines. Even if the annalist—fascinated by the technical drama—did not mention it, the women had to bring the garment into contact with the machine. Then they "chucked" a button in the "open mouth" of the machine, whereby a threaded needle "dashed through the hole and back again several times," and the button was fixed in its place. The machine automatically tied knots in the threads and cut off the ends.⁵⁰ The woman

⁴⁶Woodcock Tentler, 1979, p. 32.

⁴⁷Zaretz, 1934, p. 23.

⁴⁸Jensen, "The Great Uprising in Rochester," in Jensen and Davidson (eds., 1984), p. 97.

⁴⁹*The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 25.

⁵⁰*The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 25.

had to put in another button, and when all the buttons were put on the garment it was forwarded for examination.

The work at the buttonhole and the button machines was very tedious and monotonous, even though the women at these machines, like all women in the sewing departments but unlike the women at the knitting machines, could control the speed of the machines. They connected the garment with the machines and started them, while the machines performed the direct work operations. The annalist, probably unconsciously, called the women “attendants” to the machines. Their work situation was certainly not improved by the fact that they worked at piece rate, and their option to slow down the work speed was nothing but a chimera.

In contrast to their colleagues in the knitting departments, most sewing women controlled the machines. “The foot on the pedal controls the machine,” the annalist noted and admired the harmony between the women’s eyes, hands, and feet. But since a woman could operate only one sewing machine and since the speed of every machine depended on the capacity of a human being, many sewing machines were installed and there was a huge demand for labor in these large halls. And indeed, in his review of the company in 1923 Charles L. Pillsbury stated that about 1600 sewing machines “of the latest types” were installed in the mill.⁵¹ In 1920, a total of 24 workers were hired as machinists or machine adjusters to keep the machines running; surprisingly, one machinist was a woman. But, in general, men made the machines run, while women inspected the quality of the work that all these sewing women performed every day.

The finished garment was brought by truckers to the examining department, where the employer demanded “a keen mind, sharp eyes and continual physical activity” of the employees. Bryner maintained that the garments were not only carefully examined during the process of manufacture, but were at the same time “gone over minutely by examiners who devote all their time to the work.”⁵² The company annalist explicitly denied that the work was “drudgery,” a statement that in fact makes us suspect that the work in fact was of that nature.

⁵¹Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 2, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

⁵²Bryner, 1916, p. 44.

Garment examining and inspecting was women's work. The annalist stated that "she must have knowledge concerning the perfections and imperfections of the various operations through which each garment has passed before it reaches her hand."⁵³ Skilled experience made some women well qualified to examine the finished garments and thereby they guaranteed the quality of Munsing Wear. According to Bryner, examiners usually had "considerable previous experience in garment making as machine operators or finishers" for at least three years, but sometimes as much as eight years were required.⁵⁴ In 1918, 147 women examined the garments and another 68 inspected them at the Northwestern Knitting Company. In 1920, 198 women were hired to inspect the garments.

For garment inspection there was likewise a great variety of ages and wages. In 1918, most women were between 18 and 56 years of age, and they earned between \$7 and \$24 for one week's work. American women dominated the work, but a few Swedish-born women earned pretty well and were still employed as garment inspectors two years later: Hulda Anderson, Ida Anderson, Ellen Dahlstrom, Esther Johnson, and Emma Krafve. Obviously, the supervisors trusted American women more than others, even though experienced immigrant women also were trusted to do this work that was crucial for the reputation of Munsing Wear. Since half of the inspecting women were in their twenties, inspecting was not necessarily the climax of a long work career at the Northwestern Knitting Company.

What happened with the garments that did not pass the examination? The annalist does not even discuss that prospect; the Munsingwear ideology did not include the possibility of failure. In general, "[a]lterations and corrections of defects are made either by regular workers or by special workers," Bryner maintained.⁵⁵ At the Northwestern Knitting Company failed garments were brought back to the sewing departments, where 79, mostly very young, women mended defective garments in 1918.

Obviously, not much training was required for mending, but still a good half of them were American and most of the others were daughters of immigrants. Thus, the poorly paid mending was not a specific "she-foreign" trade but rather a task for any woman who did not sew

⁵³ *The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Bryner, 1916, p. 105.

⁵⁵ Bryner, 1916, p. 44.

more than a small part of the garments. Yet, the mending might have been the gateway to the sewing departments for young women. Seven out of eleven women of Swedish origin were still in the employ of the company in 1920, performing different kinds of work.

When accepted, the garments were passed by truckers to the underwear pressing department. The invention of the pressing machine meant increasing efficiency in garment making. Bryner observed that the latest type of pressing machines in use was “an electromagnetic machine, heated by gas and operated by electricity.” It could produce a pressure of 4000 pounds and could, in fact, “easily be operated by a woman (Fig. 4.3).”⁵⁶

At the Northwestern Knitting Company the garments “were steam pressed and sterilized upon completion.”⁵⁷ In 1917, a foreman and an assistant foreman worked in the pressing department.⁵⁸ The other workers seem to have been women. In 1920, a total of 18 women operated power pressing machines, consisting of an “immense flatiron.” Instead of drawing a press-iron all over the garment, the women had to “carefully straighten out each garment on a sheet of canvas laced into a tubular steel frame, which is automatically fed into the pressing machine.”⁵⁹ The pressing women were tenders of machines, even if they also had to perform manual work and pay considerable attention to the garment.

Most employees in laundry department, however, folded and boxed the garments. The majority of the 57 folding women in 1918 were Americans, aged 18–25, so there was something of an ethnic division of labor. Being American and having some experience of work—and life—was an advantage but some immigrants and daughters of immigrants were among the best-paid folding women, so skill also mattered for folding Munsing Wear before it was boxed. There was a great variety of wages and some women earned just \$7.45 a week in 1918, while others earned more than double that amount.

In the boxing department, the garments were packed “in the well-known ‘Munsingwear’ cartons” and prepared for transportation out of

⁵⁶Edna Bryner, *The Garment Trades*, Cleveland, 1916, p. 44.

⁵⁷Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 4, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

⁵⁸Charles Pillsbury to John S. Pardee, June 13, 1917, Main files, Box 6. F 97. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.L.8.1B, MHS.

⁵⁹*The Success of Well Doing*, 1921, p. 29.

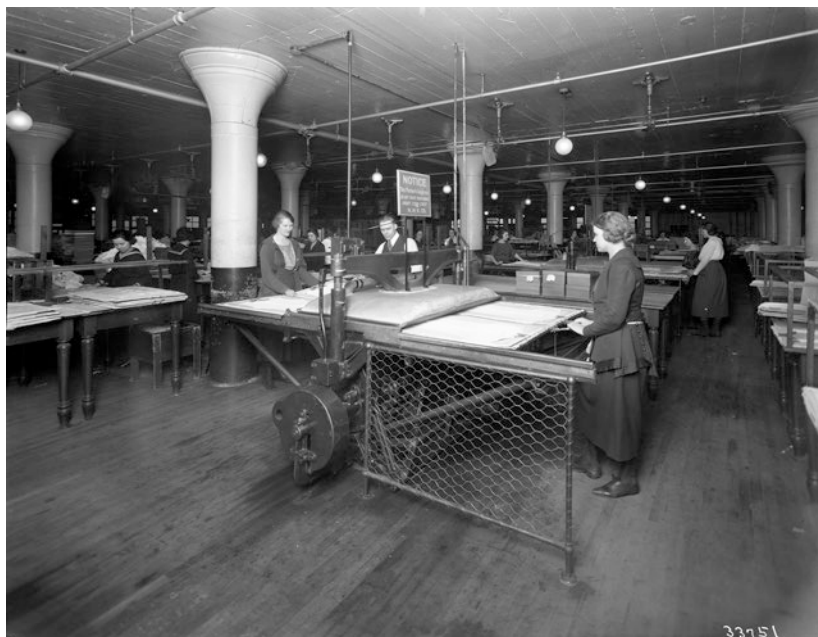


Fig. 4.3 Female employees working in the pressing department, 1921. Photographer: C. J. Hibbard. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

the plant.⁶⁰ In 1920, two men made the boxes, while 51 women folded and boxed garments and another 90 women just boxed garments. Eight women labeled the boxes. Two female clerks recorded the work of the women, and eight male truckers transported the garments.⁶¹

Boxing was a task for daughters of immigrants. In 1918, only three of the boxing women were immigrants, some were American, but 70% were daughters of immigrants. Moreover, boxing was a task for young

⁶⁰Charles Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 4, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B.

⁶¹Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, pp. 38–43 (1–50), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

women, since more than two-thirds of them were 20 years of age or younger. Supervisor Jackson was of the opinion that it did not take more than eight to ten weeks “to make a normal operator” in pressing and boxing.⁶²

The young profile of the boxing women indicates that women did not stay in that work for many years. In fact, just seven out of eighteen boxing women of Swedish descent were still folding and boxing in 1920, while two had advanced to inspect the boxing. In a way it is surprising that women did not stay in the work, since it was fairly well paid. Certainly, wages spanned between \$8 and \$22 in 1918, but as many as 67 women earned between \$12 and \$18, and the median wage was \$14 a week. Still, not even the author of *The Success of Well Doing* said that boxing was an interesting task. Instead, supervisor Jackson held the opinion that labor was “the big consideration in his department.” He would have “no difficulty in handling all the garments finished provided there was an even flow in total dozens and sufficient labor could be found.” He was especially concerned about “the presence of large numbers of new operators” due to the labor turnover, because they were “disadvantageous for the reason that a preponderance of new operators tended to depress and discourage even the old and experienced workers.”⁶³ Certainly, the many newcomers explain the wide span in wages, and there was certainly a need for an advanced strategy to get women to stay at boxing. I deal with that in Chapter 6.

The boxing was inspected too. In 1918, four female box inspectors aged 19–22 checked that the garments were boxed nicely and in order and earned the fixed sum of \$13.20 a week. One was born in Sweden, and the others were daughters of Swedish immigrants. All remained in the employ of the company until at least 1920, two as inspectors, one was boxing garments, and the fourth one was laying up fabrics. The bosses of the department were Swedish, which might explain why especially women of Swedish descent were employed there. In 1920, supervisor Jackson also oversaw the transportation of goods to and from the plant and the work of 49 truckers, who worked 104.8 hours in a wage

⁶²Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁶³Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, March 25, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

period and all of them but one earned less than \$25 a week.⁶⁴ Although not a well-paid job, transportation out of the plant was a male task and the end station of the Making of Munsing Wear before the garments reached the market.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE MAKING OF MUNSING WEAR

Expansion and Feminization of Office Work in the United States and in Minneapolis

In early industrial capitalism, the number of office employees was limited, and all of them were men. The typical clerk in the nineteenth century office was “an aspiring businessman, apprenticed to the petite bourgeoisie or the capitalist class.” He performed “a wide variety of tasks,” and his primary skill was “penmanship.” He had to make a clean copy of the manager’s draft, proofread it, make two or more copies of the definitive version of a letter or a legal document, bookkeeping, extract money from debtors, and evade creditors.⁶⁵ The clerk of early industrial capitalism was well informed about what was going on in the firm. He was “the right hand” of the owner or the top manager of a company, and he nourished ambitions to advance at work, maybe even to become a manager himself and marry a daughter of an owner or a manager.⁶⁶

In a way, office work in early capitalism was organized like a guild. A young boy was recruited to work as a messenger, an errand boy, or an office boy. He served the clerks by housekeeping, delivering copies, procuring supplies for the office, and by sweeping and dusting the office. Keeping books demanded a lot of training that errand boys could gradually learn by practicing a little at the beginning and at the end of the working day. The main requirement of the errand boys was to be available whenever needed for all kinds of unskilled work. If an errand boy was

⁶⁴Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

⁶⁵Margery W. Davies, *Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930*, Philadelphia, 1982, pp. 5, 12, 14.

⁶⁶Mats Greiff, *Kontoristen: Från chefens högra hand till proletär, 1840–1950*, Malmö, 1992, ch. III.

proficient at handwriting and counting, he could advance to being a copyist and a teller after a few years, later on ending up doing the bookkeeping. Copying was considered to be an easy task that did not require too much training or knowledge of how a business was run, but it gave some insight into how it worked. Bookkeeping, on the other hand, demanded a lot of training and knowledge of how to run a business, and it gave total control over what happened within the establishment.⁶⁷

Until 1870, the equipment of offices was very poor, and the clerk and the bookkeeper had just a quill pen, a ledger book, a letter press, and a green eye shade to help him. Some office machines had been developed before the 1890s, but were not introduced into offices more widely until that time.⁶⁸ So far, the basic skills were just an “ability to write neatly and add accurately.”⁶⁹ Beyond that, office work was very much based on personal relationship and trust. Even if there were some possibilities for upward mobility, many clerks came from the propertied classes. Yet some of the work tasks were both “tedious and repetitive,” and “ledger clerks entered figures and did elementary arithmetic, copyists copied documents all day long.” Far from all of them advanced to being “the right hand” of the company owner or the top manager.⁷⁰

However, a new way of organizing office work was about to be established, when it expanded with the growth of industrial capitalism. Offices were enlarged, and gradually their organization became factory-like. The operations of companies expanded, they became more complex, and it became more and more important to keep “accurate records” of their transactions. Gradually, clerical work became more and more subdivided.⁷¹ The making of a class of white-collar workers was about to happen, and in its gender composition it soon differed from the old staff of male clerks.

In Minneapolis, there were a good 7000 office workers registered in 1900, out of whom two-thirds were men and one-third women (Table 4.1a–b). Female office employees were younger than males due to the change in gender composition of white-collar workers and the

⁶⁷ Davies, 1982, pp. 14–18; Greiff, 1992, ch. III.

⁶⁸ Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 179.

⁶⁹ Elyce J. Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870–1930*, Ann Arbor, 1981, p. 67.

⁷⁰ Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 175; Greiff, 1992, *passim*.

⁷¹ Davies, 1982, pp. 28–30.

Table 4.1 Number of office workers by age in Minneapolis in 1900

<i>Occupation/Ages</i>	<i>10–15</i>	<i>16–24</i>	<i>25–44</i>	<i>45–64</i>	<i>65–</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>(a) Males</i>						
Bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants	6	379	843	189	20	1437
Office clerks	60	1163	1542	267	24	3056
Messengers, errand boys, and office boys		165	10	2	–	177
Stenographers, typists	3	109	75	5	–	192
All office workers	66	1816	2470	463	44	4862
<i>(b) Females</i>						
Bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants	9	330	305	8	–	652
Office clerks	25	455	189	10	–	679
Messengers, errand boys, and office girls	52	44	5	–	–	101
Stenographers, typists	7	503	383	18	2	913
All office workers	93	1332	882	36	2	2345

Source Twelfth Census of the United States 1900, vol. 13, Occupations, Washington, 1904, Table 43, pp. 614–617

later entrance of women into the profession. Around 30% of male office workers and 28% of females were bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants. Women held close to one third of all occupations as bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants. Most men, 63% of the total, were employed as office clerks, while just 29% of women held that responsible occupation. Women made up just 18% of all clerks. Most women, on the other hand, were employed as stenographers and typists, and they already dominated those professions in 1900 (Table 4.1a–b). Altogether, female office workers were much younger than their male colleagues, and their breakthrough in office work happened within the new professions as stenographers and typists.

In 1920, there were a good 13,000 male and as many female clerical workers in Minneapolis. Professions such as accountants, auditors, agents, and clerks were still men's work, while women made up 58% of bookkeepers and cashiers and 95% of stenographers and typists (Table 4.2a–b). In fact, the feminization of bookkeeping, cashier work, and stenography and typing was even more evident in Minneapolis than nationwide.

In general, however, there was no intention on the part of managers that women should pursue an office career. On the contrary. They were employed as stenographers at a particular level in the office hierarchy and were expected to remain there until they left the company for marriage. "Restricting the levels for which they were hired," says Roslyn

Table 4.2 Number of employees by age in clerical occupations in Minneapolis in 1920

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>10-17</i>	<i>18-19</i>	<i>20-24</i>	<i>25-44</i>	<i>45-64</i>	<i>65-</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>(a) Males</i>							
Accountants and auditors	–	14	113	646	185	20	978
Agents	11	18	151	766	283	38	1267
Bookkeepers and cashiers	47	156	588	1208	273	45	2317
Canvassers	5	2	12	44	36	2	101
Clerks	421	647	1745	3411	972	120	7316
Collectors	10	8	41	79	55	16	209
Messengers and office boys	461	74	26	19	9	–	589
Stenographers and typists	24	55	132	104	7	2	324
Total	979	974	2808	6277	1820	243	13,101
<i>(b) Females</i>							
Accountants and auditors	–	22	30	73	14	–	139
Agents, canvassers and collectors	7	5	38	89	20	3	162
Bookkeepers and cashiers	124	308	1064	1579	129	2	3206
Clerks	257	529	1321	1385	125	8	3625
Messengers and office girls	94	33	30	13	2	–	172
Stenographers and typists	320	951	2376	2225	84	–	5956
Total	802	1848	4859	5364	374	13	13,260

Source Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, vol. IV, Population 1920, Occupations, Chapter VII, Males and Females in Selected Occupations, Table 2, pp. 1146–1147, Washington, DC, 1922

L. Feldberg, “guaranteed that there would be no opportunity for promotion for women stenographers.”⁷² In the beginning, though, female stenographers ranked rather highly. They belonged to the group of women in Minneapolis in the late 1880s that, according to Eva McDonald, probably would be “quite indignant if classed as working girls.”⁷³ In those days, stenography was even considered to be a “profession,” and a stenographer was supposed not only to be able to take dictation rapidly but to “understand grammar and punctuation” and to have some “knowledge of business methods” as well.⁷⁴

⁷²Roslyn L. Feldberg, “‘Union Fever’: Organizing Among Clerical Workers, 1900–1930,” *Radical America*, Vol. 14: 3, 1980, p. 55.

⁷³Eva Gay, “Search for Homes,” in *St. Paul Globe*, August 5, 1888. Quoted from Hart, 2012.

⁷⁴Eva Gay, “Shorthand Fever,” in *St. Paul Globe*, September 23, 1888. Quoted from Hart, 2012.

Although the number of young messengers and office boys had increased dramatically, males on average were older in 1920 than in 1900. With the exception of messengers and office boys, the recruitment of young male white-collar workers had slowed down, while the recruitment of new young women was considerable.

So, why did employers hire an increasing number of women for office work? In 1890, labor activist Clara Lanza gave an answer by arguing that female clerical workers were preferred by employers over men because they were not only considered to be cheaper but also more efficient and “better trusted with business secrets.” Moreover, men were considered by employers to be “troublesome,” while “women come whether they have headaches or not.” Employers appreciated that women “never want[ed] a day off to attend a baseball match.” Besides, women were considered to undertake the work “with full understanding of what [was] required of them, and they [were] steadfast in the performance of their duties.”⁷⁵ That statement, however, does not explain why men remained dominant in the most powerful positions and women mostly entered the new, subordinate positions.

The scholarly literature on office work suggests two plausible explanations for the dramatic increase in women’s white-collar work. First, an intensified division of labor shaped a lot of positions for employees, who had to execute monotonous tasks in a manner that was controlled and prescribed by the employer. Rotella concludes that “[f]emale clerical workers were generally found in the most routine and mechanical works,” especially as typists and typewriters. Later on, she adds, more and more women were gradually employed for clerking and bookkeeping, while men were concentrated in the high-status, best-paid, and most powerful positions.⁷⁶ Indeed, many of the male clerks were relieved of the tedious tasks that they had to carry out before scientific management was introduced in the offices and women were employed to perform them.

Second, as within manufacturing, the subdivision of office work was accompanied and reinforced by technological changes. The first important technological change was the introduction of a useful typewriter by Remington & Sons in 1874. By 1890, at least 36,000 machines had been

⁷⁵ Davies, 1982, pp. 82f.

⁷⁶ Rotella, 1981, p. 149; Davies, 1982, pp. 163 and 166.

installed in offices in the United States. Their efficiency was emphasized, and typewriters were compared to sewing machines when it came to reducing the demand for labor. The ten-finger touch system was introduced in 1882, and machine producers trained operators who were sent to the customers who bought a machine. Gradually, schools for training in typewriting were established, and training was most often done in combination with shorthand writing. These two moments were “complementary skills” in making divided office work more efficient,⁷⁷ but the replacement of copying by stenography and typewriting did not imply any deskilling of the work, and the truth was rather to the contrary. The use of carbon paper, however, increased the efficiency of work.⁷⁸

Several other office machines were introduced in the early twentieth century: the cash register, dictating machines and stenotypes, the mimeograph machine, the Hollerith machine, a full-listing adding machine, and still others in the 1910s: the copy press, stencil or gelatin duplicators, photographing machines, the telephone, “mechanical messenger boys” such as pneumatic tubes and “overhead carriers,” adding machines, calculating machines, billing machines, bookkeeping machines, statistical machines (card punch and reader), mailing machines, letter openers, letter folders, envelope feeders, time clocks, paper cutters, padding machines, binding machines, and baling machines.⁷⁹ In 1923, a scientific manager of the time, Floyd W. Parsons, argued that “in this day of modern labor-saving appliances, it is unnecessary as well as unwise to permit employees to put nervous energy and brain effort into tasks that could be done better, cheaper, and more speedily by dictating, duplicating, billing and computing machines.” He added that such machines, in contrast to human beings, “never get tired.”⁸⁰ He did, though, ignore the fact that they did not work without the help of human beings, who certainly got tired at the end of the day.

Being new, the office machines were gender-neutral and they were not identified as part of the male-dominated office of the late nineteenth century. Consequently, young women who were employed to operate

⁷⁷Rotella, 1981, p. 68f.

⁷⁸Lisa Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870–1930*, Philadelphia, 1990, p. 84.

⁷⁹Rotella, 1981, pp. 69f.

⁸⁰Davies, 1982, p. 119.

these machines were not met by the argument that they were employed at “men’s” machines or trespassing upon “men’s work.” Due to the monotonous character of the work there was “no built-in constituency” of male operators of these machines, so women might be put to operate them without any male resistance.⁸¹

The most important aspect of scientific management was the division of labor and the diminution of control by clericals over their work. For many office employees, the division of work implied that their work was “reduced to the repeated performance of limited tasks.” Davies exemplifies with the typist who typed letters from dictaphone cylinders week after week, not being in the position to perform more than a small fraction of the work that was done day in and day out in a large office.⁸²

The Administration of the Making of Munsing Wear

Unfortunately, the author of the booklet *The Success of Well Doing* said nothing at all about work in the offices of the Munsingwear Inc. Whether that silence was an expression of the non-visibility of white-collar work or whether the managers did not have to publish such a presentation to get the required labor cannot be determined here. However, the organization chart of December 1, 1917, Charles Pillsbury’s letter to the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety in June 1917, the survey of women’s work in 1918, the payroll report of June 1920, and some notes in the *Munsingwear News* provide some help to describe and analyze work in the offices.

Certainly, the top positions at the company were held by men. These directors were so far above the others that they were not included in the payroll report of 1920, although they were in the salaried employ of the company. Their salaries were out of reach for anyone else, and they did not include themselves or were not included by others in the large and vast group of employees.

There were, however, some “mid-level” managers in the administration in lower positions than the directors. Unfortunately, there is no information on their wages. Since the payroll reports of June 1920 were part of the work of the Minnesota State Minimum Wage Commission,

⁸¹ Davies, 1982, p. 170; Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 178; Greiff, 1992, ch. VI.

⁸² Davies, 1982, p. 127.

no other information was reported on the wages of those who earned “over \$25.00 per week.” Their titles, however, indicate their class location and status. There were 20 foremen and 5 male supervisors reported from the 11 offices, who were directly subordinate to the supervisory board. The head watchman, the foreman of the print shop, the chef of the cafeteria, the assistant fiscal clerk, the traffic manager, the paymaster, the appraisal clerk, the voucher clerk, the store keeper, the statistician, and the head bookkeeper were included in that group. So were also some women: the cost clerk, two office supervisors, the social secretary, two assistant social secretaries, the editor of the *Munsingwear News*, the employment agent, the librarian of the reference bureau, and two telephone operators.

Very few women can be identified as having a position close to the directors. Ebba Wahlquist, 29 years old, single and born in the United States but claiming Swedish nationality in 1918, was one of them. Until June 1918, she was a well-paid “head of records, reports, and charts,” in other words a clerical supervisor. Then, the division manager Clarence Tolg announced to the supervisory board that she was going to end her employment and that “it appeared necessary for him to employ a young man in her place.” He had approached a man, who had “the proper training for this work.” He would be interested “to come here purely tentatively for about \$90.00 per month,” although he earned \$125.00 as a state food administrator. Manager Tolg, however, held out the prospect that the salary could be “raised very materially as soon as he makes good.” The board delegated to him to deal with the change.⁸³ In this case, there was a masculinization of a top position at the company. Still, a few women held positions rather close to the top managers of the company.

In 1918, two American women were cashiers in the accounting and clerical work division. Mrs. Wilson was a 35-year-old widow and earned \$25.00 a week, and Helen Davidson, aged 26 and single, earned \$19.50. In May 1918, her salary as assistant cashier was raised to \$100.00 per month.⁸⁴ In 1920, only Mrs. Wilson was still a cashier, while two other

⁸³Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, June 8, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁸⁴Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, May 9, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

women were reported as “cashier&clerk” and another one as “cashier&general cafeteria” work. In contrast to Mrs. Wilson, they were not paid very well and thus not reported as mid-level managers but instead were included among the infrastructural staff.

In 1920, two women held prestigious positions. Mary E. Peterson was secretary to the president, and Ada Berglund was secretary to the treasurer. They earned “over \$25.00 per week”; Miss Berglund was born in the United States but claimed Swedish nationality. In 1918, she earned \$27.00 per week for “secretarial” work, which indicates that she had a prominent position at the age of 25. Her position was also determined by the fact that the supervisory board decided her salary.

Only two more women might have made a small challenge to the male hegemony at the company. The 34-year-old and single Cathryn Carter, born in the United States but of French descent, was employed as a cost accountant in 1918 and as a cost clerk in 1920. Elsie Blossmo, a 32-year-old American woman, worked as clerical supervisor. She was married to a 34-year-old medical student, so her mediated class location via her husband was also quite a bit above most white-collar workers. In 1918, both of them earned \$37.50 a week, which was by far the highest salary for women at the company. Miss Carter was supported by three cost clerks, 26 and 27 years old, daughters of Swedish and German immigrants. So, American women did not fully monopolize the comparatively few advanced office positions for women in the company.

Another woman who earned comparatively well and held a prestigious position was employed as industrial secretary. Miss Emma Baird, a 34-year-old, single American woman, born of American parents in Turkey, held a good position in the industrial service department, earning \$32.50 a week in 1918; in 1920 she boarded with a 72-year-old Swedish-born widow, her daughter and their maid.⁸⁵

The operation of telephone calls to and from the company was another female position of trust. Telephone communication had developed between 1880 and 1930 “from crude single-line systems, each connecting two stations, to clusters of exchanges controlled by local operating companies, and finally into a corporation with connecting service throughout the nation.” In the beginning, the switchboards were served by boys, whose work simultaneously “included sweeping the

⁸⁵<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MWYG-Z9V>.

office, keeping coals on the fire and carrying out ashes, running errands, collecting bills, throwing wagon spokes at crossed phone lines, and even keeping taxi drivers informed of calls for customer service.” Many boys, however, were accused of impatience with patrons, and instead employers started to employ young, native-born, and English-speaking women who had graduated from grammar school.⁸⁶

“As it grew rapidly from crude local systems to nationwide service, the handling of telephone calls shifted from a male to a female occupation,” Elizabeth Faue claims for Minneapolis. The shift was dramatic, and by 1917 close to all switchboard work in the United States was feminized. “The hello girls were new women,” they had “a romantic and even a sexual image” and “their work symbolized what was new in American life.” In Minneapolis, they even went on strike in late 1918 and early 1919.⁸⁷

A sexual image and a grammar school degree were not enough, however, for employment as a telephone operator, and company managers did not choose just anyone for that work. Not even skill was enough: “Many companies have somewhat imposing medical or physical examination of applicants. No-one employs short girls—they want girls who can reach.” Girls who were less than five feet high were “not accepted because of their inability to reach to the top of the switchboard or a sufficient distance sideways from their position.” Certainly, productivity was of great importance, i.e. “the ‘load’ or number of calls a girl must answer in a given time.” Two hundred and twenty-five calls an hour was stated as the “breaking point” or the “limit of a girl’s power to give the public efficient service and not injure herself.” Consequently, no less than 36% of 6152 applicants for telephone work in Minneapolis in 1911 were not accepted for work.⁸⁸

Obviously, Miss Edna Edlund matched all the demands by the large employer in Minneapolis. In 1919, the *Munsingwear News* presented “Our Capable Telephone Operator” to readers of the official company magazine.⁸⁹ Miss Edlund was born in Jackson, Minnesota in 1895 as a

⁸⁶Greenwald, 1980, pp. 186 and 190.

⁸⁷Faue, 1991, pp. 10, 48–50 and 53.

⁸⁸Graham Taylor, “Telephone Girl,” in Edna Bullock (ed.), *Selected Articles on the Employment of Women*, Minneapolis, 1911, pp. 132f.

⁸⁹*Munsingwear News*, 1919: 4, p. 18.

daughter of Swedish immigrants.⁹⁰ In 1918, she was single and claimed American nationality, she earned as much as \$17.50 a week, she lived at home, and she contributed to the household economy.⁹¹ She was also considered to have a “strong feeling of loyalty to the company and of enthusiasm for the work,” which obviously added much to “the efficiency of the service.”⁹²

Most of the mid-level employees above the rank-and-file positions did not meet the directors personally other than in exceptional situations. Foremen and foreladies had a more or less distinct influence over their own tasks as well as that of other employees. Their class location at work was a little complicated between the directors and the white- and blue-collar workers. Certainly, they supervised the work of other employees in the offices, in the production, and at the reproductive work. The paymaster, the cashier, the social secretary, and the clerical supervisors communicated with the directors and the top managers of the divisions, while the others were supervised by supervisors at the same time as they communicated with employees in lower positions. But what about the rank-and-file white-collar workers?

Unfortunately, most white-collar workers were classified in the payroll of 1920 as simply “clerk.” Some positions, though, were illuminated by title, so we can get some understanding of the gender character of the division of work, and wages tell quite a lot about the gendered status of the clerks (Table 4.3). The evidence is distinct. Most men, 19 out of 24, earned more than \$25 per week, while just 16 women out of 218 did so. Instead, 79% of all women earned \$20 or less per week. Whether the clerks were “not just workers” cannot be clarified from the terminology in the payroll, but the gender division of work and the great differences in wages indicate that nearly 80% of the female “clerks” were white-collar workers.

In 1918, 62 women were involved in clerical work at the company. Most of them were Americans, aged 20–25, even if some daughters of

⁹⁰“Minnesota, Births and Christenings, 1840–1980,” index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FD9G-4J5>, Accessed 10 Apr. 2014), Edlund, May 9, 1895; citing Alba, Jackson, Minnesota, reference P. 156; FHL microfilm 1403139.

⁹¹*Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Woman’s Committee. Women in Industry Survey Forms, 1918–1919.* Microfilm SAM 222. MHS.

⁹²Taylor, 1911, p. 133f.

Table 4.3 Wages per week for male and female clerks at the Munsingwear Inc. in June 1920

<i>Sex/Dollars</i>	<i>-15.00</i>	<i>15.01-20.00</i>	<i>20.01-25.00</i>	<i>Over 25.00</i>	<i>Total</i>
Men	—	1	4	19	24
Women	73	101	28	16	218
Total	73	102	32	35	242

Note Just those who worked “full-time,” i.e. 89–93 hours per week, are included

immigrants were employed as clerks. Clerical work was not very well paid. A few women earned pretty well; six of them \$15 a week and another three earned more than that in 1918. The vast majority, however, did not earn more than between \$9 and \$12, and the medium wage was a little bit more than \$10 a week. Thus, most clerical workers earned less than many female blue-collar workers, several of them earned less than the official subsistence level, and clerical work was in general certainly not the pinnacle of a career in the office.

As already indicated, clerical work could be a little of everything. The employment of a new guide at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918 exemplifies its general description. Advertising director Morris announced that the work in the printing department had expanded so much that the foreman, who had worked as guide for visitors as well, had to devote all his energy to printing work. To compensate for this Morris

recommended that a new person be employed as guide, preferably an elderly gentleman of reasonable education and culture, who could be employed at a moderate salary, and *whose surplus time could be used on some minor clerical work of such nature that it could be interrupted at any time.* (my italics)⁹³

Several clerical tasks for women in the offices were, however, identified in the survey of 1918. Bookkeeping and billing were two of them and they underwent great changes in connection with mechanization and feminization. Bookkeeping and billing machines, which constituted a combination of typewriters and adding machines, were “used to enter

⁹³Minutes of the Supervisory Board, February 25, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

transactions and make up bills, invoices, and purchase orders.” The productivity of work at these machines was great, especially the addressing machines.⁹⁴

In 1918, eleven women aged 18–33 were employed in bookkeeping, probably supervised by a male head bookkeeper as they were in 1920, when Albert Wieske held that position over three male and twelve female clerks. All of the female bookkeepers of 1918 were single and born in the United States. Surprisingly, however, all of them but one were daughters of immigrants, four of them of Norwegian descent and the others of English, French, German, Irish, and Swedish descent. All wages were of either a full or a half dollar, which indicates that they were paid by time as they were in 1920. Care and accuracy were more important than speed in bookkeeping as well. Since their earnings, with one exception, were spread between \$9 and \$15, there was, however, a distinct hierarchy among the bookkeepers. The exception was the top wage of \$15, which was paid to three single women of non-American nationality and aged 25, 33, and 33—thus at or beyond the “marriage bar” of 25. Certainly, they had more responsible duties to perform than the others. It looks as if there were some chances for a career for daughters of immigrants within bookkeeping. Yet, no more than three of the thirteen female bookkeepers of 1918 were still in the employ of the company two years later.

Bookkeeping was about to be subdivided into limited and more precise tasks. Billing was one of these subdivided operations. In 1918, eleven women were employed as billers. All of them were born in the United States, ten of them were single, one was married, and half of them were daughters of immigrants. The billing women were aged 20–31, and they were paid a little better than bookkeepers and those who performed unspecified clerical work. Thus, there were some chances—even for daughters of immigrants—to make a little of a career as a biller. Billing was, however, another task that could not wait too long. In September 1918, the supervisory board recommended “an increase in salary of two billers, transferred from day to night work,”⁹⁵

⁹⁴Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 180.

⁹⁵Minutes of the Supervisory Board, September 24, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS

so some of the white-collar work was organized as shift work. And, in spite of the law, some female white-collar workers had to work at night in offices as well.

Stenographers and typists were two expanding groups of importance at the Northwestern Knitting Company. In 1918, there were thirteen stenographers and five typists. The typists were aged 21 and 27, while just one stenographer was under 26. Eight of them were single, but four stenographers and one typist were married and one stenographer was separated. Obviously, there was no absolute marriage bar for white-collar workers, at least not in wartime. All typists and all but one of the stenographers were of American origin, so immigrants and daughters of immigrants normally had no chance to become a stenographer or a typist at the company. The stenographers were paid individually between \$17.25 and \$25.00, while the typists were paid between \$12.50 and \$15.00 per week. Wages seem to have been standardized because careful work was a necessity, but typing was considered to be a less skilled and responsible work than stenography. Age did not matter, so the wage differences refer to differences in skill and/or status.

Scientific manager William Leffingwell, himself a trained stenographer, argued that a good stenographer had to be both skilled and experienced. She should not only be able "to run a typewriter, but also to spell and use the English language better, as a rule, than her employer [. . .]. She must have tact and diplomacy."⁹⁶ Miss Belle De Long obviously had such skills and talents, because she worked as personal secretary to sales director Kerr. In 1920, she earned over \$25.00 for 46.5 hours' work per week.⁹⁷ Miss De Long exemplifies very well the typical stenographer, who often was given work that could not be standardized. "Most frequently these tasks arose out of the administrative or supervisory functions of the stenographer's immediate boss." For managers and bosses it was often "a measure of success" and "a real convenience" to have a personal stenographer as a secretary.⁹⁸ Miss Belle De Long fulfilled that task to the director's satisfaction. In May 1918, the supervisory board

⁹⁶Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 285.

⁹⁷The Minimum Wage Commission, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, p. 2 (1-9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

⁹⁸Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 184f.

approved a raise of her salary from \$85.00 to \$100.00 per month,⁹⁹ and she was still in the employ of the company two years later.¹⁰⁰

Stenographers, however, had to match other requirements as well. In accordance with the basic ideas of the scientific management ideology, a male manager at the company explained in early 1919 why “efficient stenographers” should wear “low-heeled shoes”:

Young ladies, it is because I am not a slave driver that I wish you to wear low-heeled shoes in the office. It is mainly for your own happiness and comfort to give you a chance to *do the best work for me* in the way that is the *easiest for you*. I have had many experiments performed, with the cooperation of some of my employees, which show the unusual physical strain and brain fag resulting from sitting rigidly in one position for hours at a time. While sitting in this tense position in high-heeled shoes, you are vainly striving to find a comfortable angle for your feet, and you cannot do it. (my italics)¹⁰¹

His experiments had taught him that white-collar workers should wear low-heeled shoes to be efficient at work, and he continued:

When you stop to consider that your fingers travel sometimes over nine miles a day on the typewriter, you will realize the mental and physical effort needed to perform the work and will appreciate these considerations for your comfort.

Indeed, organizing office work according to the scientific management ideology challenged one basic part of the traditional women’s office work culture—the sexual appeal of younger, female white-collar workers wearing, for instance, “high-heeled slippers with rhinestone buckles.”¹⁰² Stenographers should no longer primarily be a belle of the boat to the top managers of a company but efficient white-collar workers.

⁹⁹Minutes of the Supervisory Board, May 9, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹⁰⁰The Minimum Wage Commission, Pay Roll Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, Payroll 2 (1–9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

¹⁰¹*Munsingwear News*, January 1919, p. 18.

¹⁰²Hartman Strom, 1992, Chapter 8, especially p. 404.

The key to the scientific management system was a work card, i.e. “a slim piece of light cardboard on which data could be recorded and then punched and sorted on a Hollerith card sorting machine” before being analyzed.¹⁰³ At the Northwestern Knitting Company the “card work” was done in the division of proportions and statistics, headed by the statistician Clarence Tolg.¹⁰⁴ Most work, however, was performed by women who operated the machines.

In 1920, two male statisticians were employed at the Munsingwear Inc., while 63 women might have been involved in the “card work” at the company in 1918, which pretty well equals the number of female “clerks” that were recorded after the “statist” Guyer in the payroll report of June 1920. Nineteen male clerks were reported among these women, and ten of them earned “over \$25.00 per week,” while another eight men were trainees aged 16–18.¹⁰⁵ Besides, the company had a trainee program for more than forty boys aged 16–19, who mostly worked as order fillers and stockmen but also a few as truckers.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the old apprentice system for office work was still reproduced at Munsingwear Inc. alongside the division of labor and the significant feminization of office work.

The first “card work” to be done was to record the information on the cards. In 1918, 22 women were involved in that work. It was obviously a low-prestige, monotonous, and tedious task, since it was poorly paid. One of these workers earned \$14 per week, while the majority earned \$10 or less, i.e. below the official subsistence level. One woman, however, seems to have had a more advanced task to perform, because her wage was paid by time unit. With one exception, the card women were single and aged between 17 and 25. Two of them were born in Scandinavia and another four claimed a nationality other than American, so American women were somewhat preferred for, but did not fully dominate that low-prestige and tedious card work.

¹⁰³Hartman Strom, 1992, pp. 26f.

¹⁰⁴Organization Charts of the Northwestern Knitting Company, December 1, 1917 and of the Munsingwear Corporation, June 1, 1921, *Munsingwear News*, March 1918, p. 10 and *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 (B), MHS.

¹⁰⁵Minimum Wage Commission. Pay Roll Reports, 1920. The Munsingwear Inc., pp. 6–8. *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

¹⁰⁶Minimum Wage Commission. Pay Roll Reports, 1920. Munsingwear Inc., pp. 47–50. *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

At least two kinds of information were registered on cards. Working time was one of them. “The new system of automatic time clocks, time cards, and use of clerks to extend time card totals on comptometers in the central office could all be instituted without formally ‘divorcing the timekeepers from the foremen’.”¹⁰⁷ So, these kinds of system were not only used for collecting information on the working hours of the employees but also to move the control of working time from the foremen on the shop floor to the company offices as well. The other information that was registered on the cards was the work that was performed by individual workers during production so that the manufacturing women could be paid by their performance at work.

The next step was sorting the cards or coupons, as they were called in 1918. Then, 21 women, most of them aged 17–19, sorted coupons, and all but three earned no more than between \$7.00 and \$8.50, i.e. far below the subsistence level. There were four clusters of earnings and some odd sums, so it is hard to say whether they were paid by time or by performance. Fifteen of them were born in the United States of immigrant parents, with nine being of Swedish descent. Sorting coupons was obviously a task for young daughters of immigrants, who recently had graduated from grammar or high school. The fact that girls attended high school longer than boys obviously made them “ideal for office work that required literacy in English and competence in mathematics.”¹⁰⁸ Since several immigrant families had reached a middle-class position in the city in the early twentieth century, they probably sent their daughters to *The Girls’ Vocational High School of Minneapolis*.¹⁰⁹ So, while young men were recruited to the company for a trainee program that would give some of them a future career at the company, young women prepared for white-collar work at school. They were not, however, prepared for a career doing office work but for performing rather tedious tasks without distinct prospects of advancement at work. They were trained to become white-collar workers.

Next, the coupons were entered into the machines by 22 single women aged 16–26 in 1918. Although they were a little older than their colleagues who sorted the coupons, they were also poorly paid.

¹⁰⁷ Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 40.

¹⁰⁸ Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 189.

¹⁰⁹ Jensen, 2004, p. 51.

A majority earned exactly \$8.00, including five women aged 24–26, while another cluster earned \$8.65 a week. They were paid by time. All of these women were born in the United States, ten of them as daughters of immigrants, so entering coupons was another chance for daughters of immigrants to get a white-collar job, although—or perhaps because—it was a tedious and poorly paid work.

At least two different machines were used at the garment giant in Minneapolis for compiling the information on the work cards. The comptometer was cheaper and much easier to operate than the adding machine, and it could be used for a great variety of tasks. The comptometer was “the first commercially successful key-driven mechanical calculator,” patented in the United States by Dorr E. Felt in 1887. By pressing a key, the value of that key was immediately added to or subtracted from an accumulator, and both multiplication and division operations could also be performed. A skilled operator could “enter all of the digits of a number simultaneously, using as many fingers as required.”¹¹⁰

Engineer Felt, moreover, developed the methods of calculation. “Rather than simply mechanizing the traditional manual computations,” he began to develop “new and improved methods” for operating his machine. He developed detailed instruction and training manuals, which were included in the purchase of a machine. In 1905, comptometer training schools were established “to formalize this operator training, and to teach the new methods of calculation.” In 1914, Felt published a large volume, *Applied Mechanical Arithmetic as Practised on the Comptometer*, which “addressed every conceivable business and commercial calculation and showed how it could be accomplished with minimum effort on the Comptometer.”¹¹¹

The educational level of comptometer operators was far below that of stenographers.¹¹² At the Northwestern Knitting Company, 12 women born in the United States and aged 18–27, were employed to operate a comptometer in 1918, but also daughters of immigrants were considered to be able to do that. Most of them were paid \$11 or \$13, so this work was paid by time and based on experience. It demanded a careful nature,

¹¹⁰<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comptometer>, September 28, 2011.

¹¹¹John Wolff’s Web Museum. <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~wolff/calculators/comptometers/Operator.htm>. September 28, 2011.

¹¹²Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 45.

but may have been tedious or too badly paid, because just four of them were still in the employment of the company two years later. The others left due either to marriage or because they found a living with another employer.

In February 1920, there were at least eight women employed in the payroll department, since Olga Styffe, Helen Zelin, Vera Zelin, Anne Swanstrom, Genevieve Vedder, M. Monson, M. Mahoney, and Anne Raggendorf participated in “The Skating Club of the Payroll Department.” In March, also Misses Olsen, Dramsen, Walgren, and Hartley were employed there,¹¹³ and Agatha Gallery was transferred to the department.¹¹⁴ So, at least eight nationalities were represented in the payroll department in 1920. Two male and thirty-five female clerks were reported with the paymaster H. F. Niemeyer in the same year. He certainly earned more than \$25.00 per week, and so did the two male and two of the female clerks. The other women earned between \$25.00 and \$47.50 for a fortnight’s work of 93 hours. All of them earned the same sum of money, so they were paid by time. The control of their work was performed in other ways than by being based on achievement. Obviously, several women worked as low-paid white-collar workers in managing the payrolls of the company. Comptometer work seems to have been the kind of clerical work that was closest to factory operative work in character.

Periodically, the work load in the payroll department was so heavy that some comptometer operators sometimes “had been obliged to work overtime,” even on Sundays. Office manager Dean recommended “that they be paid for this work at double their regular rates, amounting to a total of \$23.45.” The supervisory board approved, and the board “delegated to directors Chatfield and Pillsbury to investigate the work of the Payroll Department, ascertaining the cause of their being so much overtime work, and recommending a solution of the difficulty.”¹¹⁵

The recorded and carded information on the production and productivity of individual blue-collar workers during the production process was used to calculate the earnings of those workers who were paid by piece

¹¹³ *Munsingwear News*, March 1920, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ *Munsingwear News*, March 1920, p. 26.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of the Supervisory Board, February 25, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

rate. These calculations were made in the tabulating department that was headed by foreman Fischer. In May 1918, his salary was raised from \$80.00 to \$85.00 per month. Miss Alta Proud was his helping hand as assistant forewoman, and her salary was raised at the same time from \$50.00 to \$55.00 per month.¹¹⁶ Next to them, three young women worked in the tabulating room; one of them earned \$16.00 a week for unspecified work and the other two \$11.00 and \$10.50 for operating tabulating machines.

Operating adding machines was also done in the tabulating department. A considerable schooling and great care were demanded in comparison to operating knitting or sewing machines, although the work cannot be regarded as having been more interesting than knitting or sewing. Four daughters of immigrants operated adding machines in 1918. They were in their 20s, and one of them was married. They earned between \$10.40 and \$14.00, so even if it was not too fancy to operate an adding machine, there was some kind of individuality in the work. The adding machines, in fact, had “more ominous possibilities for bookkeepers, who held relatively prestigious positions in traditional offices,” because “machine operators could perform the bookkeeper’s computing tasks.” Contemporary machine producers highlighted the possibilities for office managers not only to “lower the cost of bookkeeping” but also to “free male clerks for more interesting tasks.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, just ten female bookkeepers worked at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918.

CLEANING AND FEEDING: REPRODUCTIVE WORK FOR “THE MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY”

At every industrial plant there is work that is not directly involved in production or the administration of production. That work, instead, provides and improves the preconditions for production and administration. At the Northwestern Knitting Company, there were several employees involved in such reproductive work, and most of them were employed in the house service department.

¹¹⁶Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, May 9, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹¹⁷Hartman Strom, 1992, pp. 185f.

Safeguarding was one of these tasks. It was male work and the editor of the *Munsingwear News* highlighted “Our watchmen”—four older men of whom one was the boss over watching.¹¹⁸ In 1920, the watchmen were not paid very well, while the head watchman earned “over \$25.00 per week.” He was registered in the office payroll among the supervisors and foremen,¹¹⁹ indicating that he was not one of the rank-and-file watchmen but given symbolic authority over them.

Cleaning the work rooms was another gendered reproductive task. In 1918, 22 women were employed as night swapers (cleaners) and they differed quite a lot from most of the other women in the employ of the company. They were much older than the average female employee. The youngest was 26 years old, four of them were aged 27 and 28, nine were between 31 and 40 years old, another five were in their forties, while three of them had passed their fiftieth birthday. Most of the swapers were married, while a few were divorced or widows. In spite of their mature age and the fact that they worked at night, they were extremely poorly paid, \$7.32 a week, which was the lowest payment at the company. Even though they normally worked fewer hours per week—in 1920 most of them were paid for 78 hours’ work in a fortnight—their earnings at the prosperous company were meager, especially since their work was performed at night. Obviously, their earnings were considered to be additional to the income of their husband. Those who did not have a husband had real difficulties making ends meet.

The low-paid work as night swapers was a “she-foreign” work, a term that contemporary writer Teresa Wolfson used for immigrant women at work.¹²⁰ All but two women were European immigrants. Three of them were born in Sweden, one in Ireland, and two in Finland. Two of the Swedish women were married to a factory worker and a watchman respectively, but the others were widows or separated/deserted. One deserted Finnish woman had to take care of six children aged 17, 16, 13, 9, 6, and 4. Probably they had to take care of themselves while their mother worked for the company.

¹¹⁸ *Munsingwear News*, June 1919, p. 19.

¹¹⁹ Minimum Wage Commission, Pay Roll Reports, 1920, Munsingwear Inc., p. 44 (1–50) and p. 1 (1–9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

¹²⁰ Wolfson, 1926, p. 37.

Most of the night swapers, however, came from Eastern Europe. One claimed to be born in “Poland” and six in Austria. Four claimed Polish and another one Ruthenian nationality, which indicates that they were born in Galicia, a province of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Another five were in fact born in Galicia, and all of them claimed Polish nationality along with one woman from Russia.

Eleven of the Polish women, aged 26–45, worked as night swapers. All of them had children aged 1–17; Katherine Spak, 42 years of age herself and married to a day laborer who earned \$15.00 per week, had nine children at home, aged 17, 13, 11, 10, 8, 6, 5, 4, and 2! The oldest one certainly had to help the father to get the smaller ones in bed at night. Certainly, however, Mrs. Spak and other married women in gainful employment also had the main responsibility for most work at home. Their poor earnings were just an urgent addition to what their husbands earned, most often between \$15 and \$21 for blue-collar workers,¹²¹ i.e. very far from the “family wage” of \$5 a day that Henry Ford paid the male workers in Detroit.

Only two women were American, so more than anything else the night swapers were low-paid married or widowed Polish immigrants of considerable age. Night swaping was not only a “she-foreign” coded work, but a poorly paid night job that married women and single mothers among the so-called “new immigrants” had to accept for the survival of their families in Minnesota. Their earnings were based on the male breadwinner ideology, also for those widows and deserted women who had no wage-earning husband.

In general, poor cleaning of working rooms was a union issue for garment workers in the United States, and it looks as if poor working conditions upset unionized garment workers in the Twin Cities as well.¹²² At the Northwestern Knitting Company, however, cleaning was part of the daily—or rather the nightly—work. Perhaps the managers and supervisors realized that dust in unclean working halls and offices also

¹²¹The information on a husband’s occupation and earnings, their draft for war into the army or the navy, and the ages of their children is taken from the survey of the women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918.

¹²²Nissa Ulven “*United Garment Workers’ Local 171: Early Years (1901–1921). A ‘Pure and Simple’ Trade Union Led by Women in St. Paul, Minnesota.*” Student paper in History 4961 W, Department of History, University of Minnesota, 2009, p. 23.

negatively affected the machinery. Too much dust from the fabric in the air could make knitting and sewing machines work less efficiently.¹²³

In 1920, 16 women were employed as a “cleaner forewoman,” and another 21 as “cleaners.” The night swapers of 1918 were included in these two categories. Eight night swapers were still in the employ of the company in 1920, four as cleaner forewomen and four as cleaners. They were of American, Irish, Finnish, German, Polish, Ruthenian (Polish), and Swedish descent. Surprisingly, nine men were reported to be cleaners. Cleaning the work rooms was less gendered than two years earlier.

Most of the cleaners and cleaning forewomen worked 78 hours a fortnight in 1920 and were paid \$27.44 each for that work. The forewoman Mary Healy and the cleaner Augusta Lindquist, for instance, worked 104 hours a fortnight and earned another \$4.45 each for those extra 26 hours. One of the male cleaners worked no fewer than 133 hours a fortnight, earning \$45.85 for all those hours. Cleaning was certainly not paid very well, and it was paid by the hour. It had to be carefully done so that the machinery worked well and the workers would not be unhealthy and inefficient.

Preparing and serving food and drinks to the employees was another reproductive work. In the very first volume of the *Munsingwear News* in 1916 a cafeteria chef and some of his assistants were presented in a photo, and another photo showed the “waitresses who help serve the appetizing viands.” There were three male and seven female assistants, while all the waitresses were women. Altogether some 20 women worked in the cafeteria.¹²⁴ The magazine also presented “the cafeteria kitchen where Chef Schlegel directs the cooking and service,”¹²⁵ so even in the kitchen women were subordinated to a man. Schlegel was reported on the special payroll for office employees, which underlines his gendered class location above the other employees in the kitchen in an extraordinary way since he managed traditional women’s work.

¹²³In a study of labor relations, working conditions and ageing of typographers in Sweden, I was able to show how lead dust made work at composing and printing machines less efficient and that managers of printing shops cared about working conditions in order to gain higher profits. See Lars Olsson, *Gamla typer och nya produktionsförhållanden*. Lund, 1986.

¹²⁴*Munsingwear News*, January 1916, pp. 2, 4–5.

¹²⁵*Munsingwear News*, January 1919, p. 17.

Another picture shows six men and one woman sitting in front of two lines of standing women. One man, the chief, was dressed in a suit, while the other men wore white clothes and headgear, indicating that they were involved in the cooking. One of the other men might have been the chief cook Carl Wenn, who worked with the second cook, Marie Lindquist. Three men were reported as doing “general labor,” one was a cleaner and another a dishwasher, while four women also washed dishes. These women did not earn less for the same amount of work than the man, but their working hours differed markedly.¹²⁶

One woman in the picture was sitting next to the chief, dressed in a white blouse and a dark skirt. She was obviously not involved in the cooking but in some kind of administrative work. Another woman, quite old, was wearing a dark dress. She was probably not involved in cooking either.¹²⁷ Pastry seems to have been a significant item for the customers, since one woman was titled “pastry cook” and another one “pastry helper” in the payroll of 1920.

Some of the employees in the kitchen had very long working days. The male chief cook and the female pastry cook were reported to work no fewer than 142 and 143.5 hours in the first fortnight of June 1920, and one of the male general laborers worked 144 hours in two weeks. The chief cook earned \$66.74 for the two weeks of work, while the pastry cook earned \$59.55 and the laborer \$49.69. The male cleaner earned \$45.85 for working 133 hours that fortnight!¹²⁸

In 1918, however, just 12 women were registered for work in the cafeteria. They were obviously regarded as differing greatly in importance, since their wages varied between \$8.00 and \$20.00. Emily Moore, a 35-year-old immigrant from Germany, earned the \$20.00, while an Irish immigrant earned \$15.00 and an American woman \$13.50. The other women earned between \$8.00 and \$11.00 weekly. Women’s work in the cafeteria was not a long-lasting employment, since just three of these women were still in the employ of the company in 1920, including Emily Moore, who earned close to \$60 for 143, 5 hours in a fortnight!

¹²⁶Minimum Wage Commission, Pay Roll Reports, 1920, Munsingwear Inc., pp. 45f., *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

¹²⁷*Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 25.

¹²⁸Minimum Wage Commission. Pay Roll Reports, 1920, Munsingwear Inc., pp. 45f. *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

Thus, ethnicity did not matter for work in the cafeteria, while gender and class did. A man supervised the work of semi-skilled and unskilled men as well as skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled women of different national backgrounds.

Since “physical welfare” was considered to be an “important concern of garment workers,”¹²⁹ medical care was another important reproductive undertaking, organized by the industrial service department. “The Home of Munsingwear” extended “a helping hand” in keeping the “family members” physically fit, by providing them with a nurse, a consulting doctor, a dentist and an eye specialist, who gave relief and advice to the employees. The company provided a restroom, which was “amply furnished with cots and blankets” so that sick employees could rest.¹³⁰

In 1920, three male “medical advisers” and a nurse were reported on the payroll. Dr. Fleming was obviously the chief medical adviser, because he earned \$50.00 for working thirteen hours in a fortnight, while the other two doctors earned “only” \$25.00 for the same amount of worked hours. Miss Alma Strand earned “over \$25.00” per week for nursing 93 hours in a fortnight.¹³¹

Lastly, the editor of the *Munsingwear News*, Miss Mollie Feldhammer, and the “reporters” at the different departments who furnished her with information performed important work of reproducing the social order at the company and—after April 1917—in society. We will approach their socializing and ideological functions in Chapter 6.

HOURS OF WORK

The Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries regulated work conditions for industries in the labor legislation of 1913 (see Chapter 2). Consequently, Stowell, the company president, reported to his colleagues on the board of directors on June 20, 1913, that “legislation of the state of Minnesota necessitated a change in the working hours and in the weekly wages of employees, and that the managing officers of the company had rearranged the working days.” On May 16,

¹²⁹Bryner, 1916, p. 112.

¹³⁰*Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 24.

¹³¹Minimum Wage Commission, Pay Roll Reports, 1920, Munsingwear Inc., pp. 8f. (1–9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

Monday through Friday, work hours for blue-collar workers were set from 7:30 a.m. to 12 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 5:48 p.m.; on Saturdays from 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Stowell concluded that the working week thus was 5 times 9 hours and 48 minutes plus 5 hours, making a total working week of 54 hours. The new schedule provided for a “Saturday afternoon holiday.” He added that persons who were paid by hourly rates were paid for 55 hours, if they worked their regular 54 hours.¹³² Thus, the company gave a bonus to encourage workers to work a full maximum week.

The new schedule was preceded by a discussion of the lunch break. Company president Stowell claimed to the Commissioner of Labor, W. F. Houk, that the company management was “anxious to make a re-adjustment” of the noon break “effective May 16th.” He stated that “practically none” of the employees left the mill during the noon break and claimed that “they prefer a later starting hour rather than more time at noon.” He also told the commissioner that a noon break of just thirty minutes had “been in vogue in our establishment for over twenty years.”¹³³ The matter was investigated by Agnes Peterson, who informed the Commissioner in a letter of May 21 about a visit to the company:

In compliance with your request, Miss Klapp has visited the above-named firm and reports that all the girls prefer the half hour nooning as it will allow for their having Saturday afternoon off. This firm has provided a very pleasant lunch room and serve [*sic*] coffee at noon for the small charge of three cents a cup.

They have also made arrangements to comply with the fifty-four hour law, beginning May 19th.¹³⁴

Thus, neither the directors nor the employees minded a shorter noon break in order to have Saturday afternoon free. The interests of

¹³²Secretary’s Record Book, 1910–July 1919, pp. 80–81, and Extracts of Minutes of Stockholders and Directors’ Meetings, 1887–1925, June 20, 1913, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B (ov), MHS.

¹³³Hours of Labor Correspondence, 1909–1919. *Minnesota State Archives. Labor and Industry Department*. Location: 115.H.17.9 (B).MHS.

¹³⁴Hours of Labor, Correspondence, 1909–1919. *Minnesota State Archives. Labor and Industry Department*. Location: 115.H.17.9 (B).MHS.

the directors and the employees coincided in this matter, and the Commissioner of Labor accepted the proposed arrangements.

A new discussion on working hours was put on the agenda again after the enforcement of the new labor legislation for women in 1918 (Chapter 2). On May 6, the board of directors decided that office hours in the morning should remain from 8 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., while the afternoon shift should be shortened by 10 minutes and end at 5:30 p.m., except on Saturdays, when office hours should last from 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The office bell should ring at opening and closing times, and “all employees should be at their desks for starting work when the bell rings at opening time” and they should remain at work until “the bell rings at closing time.” However, the bell should not ring until five minutes after the opening times, “thus giving the employees five minutes in which to arrive at their desks after registering at the opening hours stated.” At closing time, on the other hand, “the bell should ring at announced times.” The board maintained that “it is necessary in so large a general office with so many employees, to have definite discipline of this character,” but “the enforcement must be of a friendly nature—not too rigid.”¹³⁵ Obviously, the directors were fully aware of the existence of habits, informal rules, and workplace culture in offices as well, but they were determined to put an end to the old pre-industrial system of a porous and “inefficient” working day in order to compensate for the new labor legislation.¹³⁶

The matter of working hours at the company, though, remained an issue of discussion. An undated inspection of the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918 by the Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries proved that 12 employees worked 7 days a week, including regular work on Sundays, while 360 “regular night workers” were reported, including the women who cleaned the work rooms every night. The hours of labor were said to be 9 per day and 54 a week, while the 12 regular night and Sunday workers worked for the company no fewer than 63 hours a week.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, May 6, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹³⁶ Edward P. Thompson, “Time, Work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism,” in *Past & Present*, 38, 1967.

¹³⁷ Inspections, Textiles, 1917–1918, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industry*, Minneapolis, Location 126.J 2.3, MHS.

The company directors were obviously aware of their violation of the labor laws; after all a state labor inspector testified in 1918: "Laws posted."¹³⁸ The secretary of the supervisory board noted in October 1918: "For some time past, the officials of the Company had been considering the matter of shortening the hours, and it has already been decided to reduce the mill hours from 54 to 50 per week." Effective as of November 1, 1918, the working hours of the mill were to be: 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Saturdays 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. Office workers should start working at 8:15 a.m., have a noon break between 12:15 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., and their working day should end at 5:15 p.m. On Saturdays, both mill and office employees worked between 8:15 a.m. and 12:30 a.m.¹³⁹ Thus, the start of the working day for blue-collar workers was postponed by half an hour, and their working day ended a quarter of an hour earlier than before. Still, blue-collar workers had longer working days than white-collar workers.

President Stowell was pleased to tell the stockholders in January 1919 about the new working hours:

Being desirous that all the conditions of employment in our institution may be satisfactory to all concerned, also that *we may keep ahead of any legislation* in such matters we voluntarily reduced our working hours on November first [1918] from fifty-four hours per week to fifty hours per week. (my italics)¹⁴⁰

The company president added that the directors "made certain adjustments in compensation which should make it *possible for an efficient and energetic worker* to experience no decrease in earnings (my italics)." A reduction of working hours should obviously be compensated by a speeding up of work that would recompense not only the employees, who could put more energy into their work, but also the employer due to higher productivity.

¹³⁸Inspections, Textiles, 1917–1918, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industry*, Minneapolis, Location 126.J 2.3, MHS.

¹³⁹Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, October 28, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹⁴⁰Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Book 1910–July 1919, p. 242, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

Another shortening of working hours was made effective on June 1, 1920. The supervisory board decided that “the mill hours” should be reduced from 50 to 48 hours per week. This change should be brought about by closing the mill at noon instead of 12.30 p.m. on Saturdays, and 12 minutes earlier every other weekday evening, i.e. at 5.18 p.m. The supervisory board decided that all piece work and hourly rates should be “increased pro rata, so as to result in the same compensation on the 48 hours basis as now obtains on the 50 hours basis.” Since certain employees of the service division were following mill hours, “the same shortening of hours and corresponding earlier closing times, and the same pro rata increase in hourly rates shall apply to such employees.” The board, however, feared that some logistical problems could appear as a result of the new closing hours, so the directors decided that, “inasmuch as under this new plan the mill will close each week day except Saturday at 5:18, it is essential that the closing time for the general office be made somewhat earlier than at present, 5:15, so as to avoid the increased congestion in the street and in street car service which would otherwise obtain.” Consequently, the general office should close at 5:10 p.m. on all weekdays except Saturday. The board decided that “the five minutes should not be made up by beginning earlier in the morning, or by decreasing the noon hour, but that the actual working time be decreased five minutes per day for the five days per week.”¹⁴¹

The shortening of working hours from 50 to 48 in 1920, however, is a little confusing, since the federal “Women in Industry Service” of the United States Department of Labor had on December 12, 1918, made official its “STANDARDS GOVERNING THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRY,” which proclaimed that “NO WOMAN SHALL BE EMPLOYED OR PERMITTED TO WORK MORE THAN EIGHT HOURS IN ANY DAY OR FORTY-EIGHT HOURS IN ANY ONE WEEK.” It was further stated that “AT LEAST THREE QUARTERS OF AN HOUR SHALL BE ALLOWED FOR A MEAL,” and that “NO WOMAN SHALL BE EMPLOYED BETWEEN THE HOURS OF TEN P.M. AND SIX A.M.”¹⁴² The proclamation, however,

¹⁴¹ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, May 10, 1920, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹⁴² Standards recommended for the employment of women, by the Council of National Defense, Washington, December 12, 1918, Minnesota State Archives, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Correspondence and Subject Files, Location 103.K.7.12 (F), MHS.

seems to have been just a recommendation, since “the federal government call[ed] upon the industries of the country to co-operate with state and federal agencies in maintaining the standards herein set forth as a vital part of the reconstruction program of the nation.” Thus, it took almost two years for the directors of the company to implement the working hours come true that the federal government demanded just after the war ended. Perhaps the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, the “Watchdog of Loyalty,” that was asked to “give publicity to the attached standards under which women can be employed in industry,” did not put too much energy into the matter? After all, its leading figure was closely affiliated with big business in Minnesota.

In spite of the official acceptance of the regulated weekly working time, the management of Munsingwear Inc. did not practice the labor laws fully. According to the payroll report to the Minimum Wage Commission 1920, no fewer than 878 employees worked 104 hours in two weeks, another 93 employees between 105 and 115 hours, and still another 56 more than 115 hours in a two-week period. So, 44% of the workers worked far beyond what the directors claimed that the employees worked for them in 1920. Watchman John Cameron was paid for 180 hours both the first and the second fortnight of June 1920! The management of the company broke the labor laws of Minnesota. Certainly, this was not only a political but also a trade union issue, so let us approach the trade union aspect of the Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Inc.



A Non-union Shop

ORGANIZED LABOR WITHIN THE US GARMENT INDUSTRY

Garment workers initiated trade unions in the United States in the 1880s. Originally, these unions were split up along both ethnic lines and occupational groups. Both Jewish and Italian garment workers had their own unions, and so had several different occupational groups.¹ In 1891, however, cutters and tailors initiated the American Federation of Labor (AFL)-affiliated United Garment Workers of America (UGWA) that focused on workers who made men's garments. It was dominated by skilled cutters, and union officers hoped that consumers would buy only garments with a label that indicated that union demands on wages and work conditions were fulfilled at the company. The UGWA acted for restrictions on immigration into the United States and argued that the new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were unscrupulously exploited by manufacturers, especially contractors.²

In 1903, the UGWA had 25,000 members.³ A breakthrough came after a series of successful strikes in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Kalamazoo in 1910–1912, involving 20,000 women. Joan M. Jensen claims that “the clothing industry was one of the labor sectors most affected by strikes” in the early twentieth century, and she

¹Zaretz, 1934, p. 82.

²McCreesh, 1985, pp. 45–47.

³McCreesh, pp. 82f.

classifies the needle trades as “the third most strike-prone industry” in the United States.⁴ In 1914, the *Garment Worker* identified the problem and stated that the UGWA was a union which had “more strikes and less money to finance them with than any international union affiliated with the American Federation of Labor.”⁵

The successful strikes made unionizing of more garment workers come true within the next few years. Carolyn Daniel McCreesh maintains that young Jewish women “provided the catalyst for the uprising and subsequent strikes in urban centers,” while “American born women took the offensive in smaller garment centers.”⁶ In fact, the UGWA initiated a national campaign to organize workers within the men’s garment industry in 1913 and increased its membership to 60,700.⁷ Its convention in 1914 concluded that organizers had made “marvelous progress within the last few years,” but also that garment workers had just begun to organize.⁸

As within other trades, unionism in the garment industry was attacked by an “active hostility of employers’ associations.” The contemporary scholar Francis Haas explained their strategies: “Advantage was taken of the division in the trade between the cutters and trimmers on the one hand and the operators, tailors, and finishers on the other.” Managers tried to split the workers of the trade by approaching the cutters, who made up the smallest but most influential section of the UGWA.⁹ Sometimes they attacked organized labor harder by establishing associations that were “specifically designed to crush the union movement.” Lockouts, blacklisting, “blatant abrogation of union contracts” and unsuccessful strikes paved the road for open shops.¹⁰

Beside the “active hostility of the employers’ associations” and lack of funds, organized labor within the garment industry faced at least three obstacles to overcome before garment workers had an efficient trade union.

⁴Joan M. Jensen, “The Great Uprisings: 1900–1920,” in Jensen and Davidson (eds.), 1984, p. 86.

⁵Quotation from Haas, 1922, p. 37.

⁶McCreesh, 1985, pp. 142 and 148.

⁷McCreesh, p. 39.

⁸*Documentary History of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, V, 1914–1916, p. 39.

⁹Haas, 1922, pp. 34.

¹⁰McCreesh, 1985, pp. 93f.

First, *union administration* was a complex matter. Inequalities in wages generally made a problem for trade union unity, especially when the minimum and the maximum earnings of groups of workers diverged. In those cases, the union officers were “placed in the predicament of setting the scale low enough to prevent competition from those who cannot command the union rate and high enough to make the union idea sufficiently attractive to the more efficient.”¹¹

Second, *gender* mattered. Even though the UGWA organized more women than any other national union affiliated with the AFL,¹² men totally dominated the union. Initially, male workers “tried to prevent women co-workers from improving their economic status, often disregarding their own union’s constitution in the process.” Men even tried to prevent women from improving their wages and working conditions “by blocking them from union membership and preventing them from moving into male dominated jobs.” In union shops, the union worked for better conditions for male workers but, “left it up to the manufacturer to handle the women workers.” It happened that company managers supported the top officers of unions to organize a new union just for male workers, where the women organizers worked.¹³ This alliance between employers and male unionists is an illustrative example of Heidi Hartmann’s classical thesis that gender, at least sometimes, overruns class at work.¹⁴

Gradually, though, men “awakened to the importance of including women in their unions and took steps to recruit women workers,” but union men most of all wanted to bring women into the union, collect their dues, and prevent them from “competing against” the male workers for the most desirable jobs.¹⁵ Consequently, just a few unionized women “played leadership roles in the union.”¹⁶ The Swedish-born labor activist Ellen Lindstrom was an exception when she was appointed a

¹¹Haas, 1922, p. 36.

¹²McCreesh, 1985, pp. 82f.

¹³McCreesh, 1985, pp. 116f.

¹⁴See for instance, Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” in *Capital & Class*, Vol. 3: 2 (1979), pp. 1–33.

¹⁵McCreesh, 1985, p. 70.

¹⁶McCreesh, p. 48.

member of the national executive board of the UGWA. Altogether, however, the female representation remained limited, and the UGWA continued to accept the disparity between wages for men and women, and it still “did little to encourage women to assume leadership positions.”¹⁷ At the UGWA convention in 1914, only one out of 111 delegates was a woman, while 7 of the 152 delegates at the 1916 convention were women,¹⁸ so small steps were taken to overcome the gender gap between the union officers and the rank-and-file workers and union members in the 1910s.

The third obstacle for the union to overcome in order to develop into a forceful partner in the garment industry was the *ethnic division* of the workers. In the beginning, Americans dominated both the trade and the unions, but gradually the trade in New England was dominated by Jewish and Italian immigrants.¹⁹ In the unions, on the other hand, the old stock of Americans and Irishmen dominated for quite a long time. That was true for both men and women. McCreesh concludes that “Irish-American women served as union organizers [. . .] long after their countrywomen were pushed from the industry by newer immigrants.”²⁰ Haas stated in the early 1920s that the fact that the workers were immigrants “assisted in keeping them unorganized, although it was not a controlling factor.”²¹

There were also political conflicts within the leadership of the UGWA that were partly based on ethnic antagonism. Most of its leaders held anti-Semitic values, while several of their opponents within the union were Jewish tailors from Eastern Europe. Also Italian, Polish, and Bohemian workers became labor activists within the garment industry. Still there were “ethnic differences and generations of prejudice” in the union.²²

¹⁷McCreesh, pp. 82ff.

¹⁸*Documentary History of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, V, 1914–1916, photos before pp. 3 and 111.

¹⁹On Italian and Jewish female garment workers, see Marie C. Furio, *Immigrant Women and Industry: A Case Study. The Italian Immigrant Women and the Garment Industry 1880–1950*, New York, 1979, Friedman-Kasaba (1996), and Guglielmo (2010).

²⁰McCreesh, 1985, p. 5.

²¹Haas, 1922, pp. 34f.

²²Jo Ann E. Argersinger, *Making the Amalgamated: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Baltimore Clothing Industry, 1899–1939*, Baltimore, 1999, pp. 70f.

So, let us approach the Northwestern Knitting Company to see how gender and ethnicity worked for the unionization of its workers.

UNIONIZATION EFFORTS OF GARMENT WORKERS
IN MINNEAPOLIS AND AT THE NORTHWESTERN KNITTING
COMPANY/THE MUNSINGWEAR CORPORATION

Historian George D. Tselos maintains that workers in the clothing industry in Minneapolis did not join unions throughout the 1920s, and especially:

The three largest Minneapolis clothing factories were totally non-union. Apparently Boulevard Frocks, making cotton dresses, and Munsingwear, the largest underwear plant in the country with 2,000 employees, had never been subject to organizing attempts.²³

Tselos's statement, however, is not totally true. In fact, several female garment workers at the Shotwell, Clerihew, and Lothmann factory, some of them members of the Knights of Labor's Women's Assembly, went on strike in April 1888 because of a reduction of existing low piece-rate wages, poor working conditions, an exploitative manager, an insulting forelady, and harassing clerks. The strike was highlighted in local newspapers, and some claimed that it was initiated due to a critical article in the *Globe* by Eva McDonald. The strikers were greatly supported not only by organized labor but also by several Progressives and by the public opinion in the Twin Cities. The conflict, though, ended in the bankruptcy of the company. Some of the striking women "returned to the round of job seeking that was a prelude to marriage, while others returned home to live with their families."²⁴ Some were probably hired at the newly started Northwestern Knitting Company.

Two decades later, however, garment workers in Minneapolis started a union. They founded Local 27 of the UGWA in 1907, and affiliated it with the Central Labor Union of Minneapolis and Hennepin

²³George Tselos, *The Minneapolis Labor Movement in the 1930s*, University of Minneapolis, 1970, pp. 35–37.

²⁴Fauc, 2002, pp. 20ff and 30.

County. According to the biennial reports by labor organizations to the Department of Labor and Industries, Local 27 held its meetings at Richmond Hall in Minneapolis. In 1914, Mary Bahnemann of German descent served as union secretary, and in 1918 Stella Janovitz of Czech descent succeeded her in that position.²⁵ In 1914, Local 27 had nine male and 80 female “members in good standing,” and 75 women and three men were registered as such in 1918.²⁶ So, after all, several women and a few men in Minneapolis did take part in the unionizing of garment workers in Minneapolis. Moreover, Local 27 had an agreement with at least some employers in Minneapolis in the 1910s, saying for instance that male workers were paid by the week, while female workers did piecework. The average working time in the garment industry was reduced from 8 hours and 48 minutes a day in 1914 to 8 hours and 30 minutes in 1918.²⁷

The workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company did not join Local 27. Still, a few of them went on strike in 1914. On a Saturday in late July 1914, fifty “Minneapolis girls”²⁸—underwear cutters and markers at the Northwestern Knitting Company—went on strike due to—in the words of the managers—“a readjustment of wages,” which implied that “some of the girls who had been making top pay saw that they would have to come to average money.” Another five women “walked out” because of “intolerable conditions.”²⁹ Without having read Fredrick W. Taylor’s ideas on scientific management and the achievement-based wage system, these women realized very well the exploitative dimension of the system.

The *Minneapolis Labor Review* considered the chances for the striking women *not* to be very good:

²⁵Trade unions reports and correspondence 1913–1921, *Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.8 F, MHS.

²⁶“Good standing membership” meant that a member had paid all dues to the union. See, *Documentary History of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, V, 1914–1916, p. 36.

²⁷Trade union reports and correspondence 1913–1921. *Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.8 F, MHS.

²⁸*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, July 30, 1914, p. 8.

²⁹*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, July 30, 1914, p. 8; *Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 31, 1914, p. 4.

There are 800 other textile workers in the factory, but they have never given organization a thought, when if they had done so they need never work for the miserable pittance they now receive. Textile workers have splendid organizations all through the east, but the order of unionism has been made so offensive by the employers at the Northwestern Knitting Works that the employees [*sic*] have never dared to make a start in that direction.³⁰

The *Tribune* declared that the strikers had “no hope of union support,” while the *Labor Review* assured that it had repeatedly paid attention to some of the conditions there, most of all the low wages. Still, the magazine declared why the strikers could not expect union support:

The Labor Review is not fighting battles for workers who do not care to spend a few dollars for their own benefit in organization. If every wage worker there would have her pay cut tomorrow she and her companions would be only reaping the whirlwind due them for neglecting the opportunity afforded of effecting a splendid and forceful organization.³¹

No information has been found about the outcome of the strike, but it would take nearly another 20 years for garment workers to win a labor conflict in Minneapolis. The strike at the Strutwear Hosiery Company in 1935–1936, however, is the well-known but late and exceptional example of garment workers’ activism in the city.³²

As the UGWA did nationally, Local 27 might have trusted the union label policy which could even imply that unions “sold the UGW label to companies that negotiated only with cutters and trimmers.” That does not seem to be reasonable though as just a handful of men joined the union. The *Union Labor Bulletin*, published by United Union Card and Label Council of Minneapolis, argued for the union label policy within the garment industry of the city. It proclaimed:

The label of this union deserves the support of every red-blooded union man and woman, as its members have struggled earnestly and consistently against odds that would discourage many of us. This label on a garment

³⁰ *Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 31, 1914, p. 4.

³¹ *Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 31, 1914, p. 4.

³² Faue, 1991, ch. 4.

is a safeguard against the products of the sweat shop. It will be found on aprons, jackets, suits and overcoats for the jobbers' trade.³³

Certainly, this consensus-minded bulletin spoke in general for companies that did not practice the sweatshop system but accepted unions, and the statement could be a request to the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company to tolerate its employees to join the union. In fact, the company directors advertised for the Munsing Wear in the *Union Labor Bulletin*.³⁴ These advertisements did not show up until August 1917, when the United States had entered the war and when the AFL and its affiliated unions backed the war efforts of the federal government. Indeed, the advertisement was an act of support of and cooperation with the consensus-minded United Union Card and Label Council of Minneapolis. Moreover, the Northwestern Knitting Company gave \$657.50 in the fiscal year of 1918 as a "contribution" to local "labor organizations," which was more than its contribution to charities and religious purports and made up a full 8 percent of its collected contributions to local activities.³⁵ It looks as if the directors of the company tried to integrate parts of the trade union movement into the social order in Minneapolis. They approached and supported consensus-minded unions like the United Union Card and Label Council of Minneapolis, but no trade union at all was established at the company. The Northwestern Knitting Company was "a non-union shop," when the young Myrtle Harris worked there between 1914 and 1918.³⁶

At the end of 1918, though, the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA) made an effort to unionize garment workers in Minneapolis. In a letter to the labor organizer Lynn Thompson in Minneapolis, the President of the UTWA John Golden wrote:

Dear Sir and Brother:

I have consulted with the members of our Advisory Board in regard of the matter of organizing the textile workers in your locality. I informed them that you were in a position to devote a portion of your time to this work and I was instructed to make the following proposition to you:

³³ *Union Labor Bulletin*, March 1917, p. 13.

³⁴ *Union Labor Bulletin*, August 1917, back page.

³⁵ Secretary's Record Book 1910–July, 1919, p. 248, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

³⁶ *Oral History Project*, 1975, Myrtle Harris, MHS.

To pay you \$20.00 per week for a month and if in your opinion the results obtained were satisfactory but the work not yet finished, to continue for another month under the same conditions. And then at the end of this time we can again discuss the situation and if necessary, make further provisions. Of course this offer does not include any legitimate expenses you may incur in the organizing work.

Trusting to hear from you on the matter and if the terms are satisfactory you may start immediately on receipt of this letter.³⁷

Attached to the letter is a small handwritten letter from Louis Wille in Minneapolis, dated December 23, 1918, and directed to the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly, saying:

Dear Sir:

The following are the names and address of textile workers of the Northwestern Knitting Works; as you agreed to allow me 5 ¢ per name.

I am giving the other boys five cents for every name they get in other Dept. than mine.

The names were listed on another piece of paper. They were: Adolf Carlson, Phillis Erickson, Lucille Grignon, Anna McCay, Marion Baker, Rose Nordstrom, Nina Miller, Joyce Arnes, H. Diesen, Mercedes Heine, Robert Landberg, and Chas Hansen.³⁸ Eight of them were still in the employ of the Northwestern Knitting Company in June 1920, when all of them worked in the knitting departments. Adolf Carlson and Chas Hansen were knitting machine adjusters, while Phillis Erickson, Lucille Grignon, Anna McCay, Nina Miller, Helga Diesen and Mercedes Heine operated knitting machines. Thus, men and women of different positions at work in one specific part of the mill (knitting) and of several national backgrounds (Anglo, Scandinavian, German, and French) were eligible for trade union activities at the Northwestern Knitting Company.

The approaches to the workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1918 were part of a broader unionizing effort by the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly, which “funded a drive to organize textile workers” just after the end of the war. Elizabeth Faue claims that “the

³⁷Papers of Garment Workers, undated, 1918–1946, 1952–1955, *Central Labor Unions of Minneapolis and Hennepin County, Archives*, Box 10, Location P320, MHS.

³⁸In 1920, Lucille Grignon was reported “back on days again.” Obviously, she worked evenings and/or nights before that. *Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 17.

union [...] had soon recruited over a hundred members from the anti-union Northwest [*sic*] Knitting Company.” The success was, however, temporary, because organizer Thompson “later” reported: “The work is slack and this seemed to put the fear in the members, and it is going to be a hard case to keep this organization going.”³⁹ The effort to unionize workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company was a failure. The reluctance of garment workers in Minneapolis, indeed, does not confirm Furio’s statement that “[t]he war years [...] saw great increases in union membership” among garment workers in the United States and that women then “began to take [...] their unions more seriously.”⁴⁰ At least, the women and men at the Northwestern Knitting Company did not.

So, why did the garment workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company—males and females—not join the union until much later? Certainly, I will not be able to give a definite answer to that question, but I will eliminate some proposed explanations in the literature as to why female garment workers did not join the union. I will propose two circumstances that might contribute to an understanding of the matter.

First of all, we have to highlight the expansion of trade unions in Minneapolis in the 1910s, when the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly “concentrated its attack on one industry after another.”⁴¹ In 1914, one hundred trade unions worked in Minneapolis and their membership amounted to 15,000 workers (Chapter 2). Moreover, in 1916 the Socialist Thomas Van Lear was elected Mayor of Minneapolis, which indicates that, in general, there was strong support for the Socialist labor movement. Not until the anti-union and anti-Socialist Minnesota Commission of Public Safety was established in April 1917 did the anti-Socialist aggression by the establishment in Minneapolis and Minnesota weaken the labor offensive.

So, even if there might have been a decline in unions after the entry of the United States into the war, we cannot consider the fact that women and men at the Northwestern Knitting Company did not unionize as part of a general pattern of workers and unions in the city. Rather, they were an exception. In general, though, men made up the unions in those days, so maybe it was a matter of gender? In her pioneering work on gender relations in the labor movement in Minneapolis from

³⁹Faue 1991, p. 53.

⁴⁰Furio, 1979, p. 306.

⁴¹Millikan, 1986, p. 159.

1915 to 1945, Elizabeth Faue maintains that “unions and the Left” failed to “respond to women’s needs on the same basis as men’s.”⁴² The statement seems to be reasonable, when considering that just a few hundred of the unionized workers in the city were women. It looks as if the needle trades did not have a high priority in the labor offensive in Minneapolis, and it seems that gender mattered for the AFL-associated unions in the city. On the other hand, about 400 male blue-collar workers in the employ of the Northwestern Knitting Company also stood out of the union. We have to find special circumstances within the garment industry or within the large “Munsingwear Family” to get some understanding of why the company was a non-union shop in the 1910s. Let us start with the garment industry in general.

McCreesh claims that garment workers did not join the unions because “the industry was fragmented and working places so diverse, [that] experiences of women garment workers varied enormously.”⁴³ She refers to the garment industry in different cities and to different kinds of production. Certainly, Minneapolis was far away from Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago; certainly, the making of underwear differed from other productions of garments. But other kinds of production also varied significantly regionally and regarding production without stopping workers from entering the union. Garment making in Minneapolis did not stand out as *the* exception in the trade but was one of many diversities in the US garment industry. And, in general, the number of unionized garment workers increased substantially, especially after the large strikes in the early 1910s, so garment workers who made different kinds of garments in diverse cities of the nation did join a union. In that respect, Minneapolis was an exception compared to several other large garment cities, but it can hardly be explained by the character of garment making at the Northwestern Knitting Company. There was hardly any underwear exceptionalism in Minneapolis.

McCreesh further claims that the seasonal character of garment work explains why garment workers in general did not unionize.⁴⁴ The work at the Northwestern Knitting Company was not seasonal, however. On the contrary, the directors underlined that they wanted labor all the year

⁴²Faue, 1991, p. 153.

⁴³McCreesh, 1985, p. 16.

⁴⁴McCreesh, 1985, pp. 29f.

around. Moreover, the workers at the company did not work under the sweatshop system or other forms of subcontracting but in a large plant that was characterized by decent physical working conditions, and the workers carried out their parts of the work within a coherent work organization that was planned in every detail. Generally, such circumstances are favorable for unionization.

Another proposed explanation why garment workers hesitated to unionize is the “ethnic split” between garment workers: anti-Semitism, anti-Italian attitudes, and other forms of xenophobia existed among garment workers in New England. McCreesh argues that American women did not join unions because they were based on immigrant women who had spent just a few years in the United States: “Meanwhile the influx of the new immigrants pushed Irish-American workers out of the garment industry into better paying jobs as clerical workers or dressmakers in exclusive shops.”⁴⁵ At the Northwestern Knitting Company, though, about half of the female workers were “American” women. They were not pushed out of the industry and in fact made the largest national group at the plant by far. The two national groups of immigrant garment workers who were said to dominate the industry and the unions in New England—East European Jews and Italians⁴⁶—were represented by just a handful each at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Still, we cannot approve Laura E. Weber’s claim that “Minneapolis did not have much to offer [Jews] in the line of light manufacturing, which provided employment to [them] in other large cities.”⁴⁷ Rather, Jewish women might have been discriminated against at the Northwestern Knitting Company by the employer, since there was a large Jewish community in the city.⁴⁸

Moreover, national background was no bar to employment at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Certainly, there were ethnic networks in “the Munsingwear Family.” In 1919, for instance, a group of Swedish women met for a luncheon at the home of Hedvig Gustafson. She hosted Jennie Carlson, Anna Nordstrom, Caroline Nordstrom, Anna Lindquist, Inga Ween, Ruth Anderson, Alma Nelson, Christine

⁴⁵McCreesh, 1985, p. 71.

⁴⁶Friedman-Kasaba, 1996, and Guglielmo, 2010.

⁴⁷Laura E. Weber, “‘Gentiles Preferred’: Minneapolis Jews and Employment, 1920–1950,” in *The North Star State*, ed. Ann J. Aby, St. Paul, 2002, p. 392.

⁴⁸Hyman Berman, “The Jews,” in *They Chose Minnesota*, pp. 489–507.

Grafstrom, and Minnie Reiman. But female Munsingites also met over ethnic borders, and, for instance, Ellen Olson, Molly Crichton, Dorothy Beaudette, and Gertie Lanars “enjoyed supper at the home of Mildred Leitschuh.”⁴⁹ Such network meetings were reported in more or less every issue of the *Munsingwear News*, which means that both ethnic and cross-ethnic networks were important for many women at work at the company.

Other researchers claim that some immigrant women did not join the union due to their gendered cultural background. Marie C. Furio claims that Italian women in their “initial experience with unions” in the United States showed themselves “incapable of forming ties of loyalty outside the family.” Their culture was one of the greatest barriers to them joining a union, because “dedicated docility and obedience [were] most desirable womanly virtues.” Furio underlines that “[t]hese values were in direct conflict with militant trade union practices” in the garment trades. Especially, Italian women were unwilling to join the union if they dreamed of returning to Italy after having earned some money. Only when their chances to return faded away did the extremely hard and exploitative working conditions and union activism make them more inclined to agitation and to join the union in increasing numbers.⁵⁰

Furio’s analysis is plausible, but on the other hand, it seems unclear whether these family bonds and perceptions of the unions were special for Italian women. At least the Swedish labor migrant Evelina Johansdotter went to Minneapolis to earn some money and then return to Sweden, which she did—twice. Rather, she illustrates the importance of emigration for the emancipation of young rural women from patriarchal family structures in Sweden.⁵¹ Single women in particular could loosen their family bonds in another country. Further, Furio claims that several Italian women unionized when they had decided to stay in the new country and started to identify themselves as workers.⁵² Certainly, the two processes were intertwined, but settling in another country to work outside the family is not a sufficient reason for a single immigrant woman to identify as a worker and join the union. Several did not.

⁴⁹ *Munsingwear News*, April 1919, pp. 20 and 21.

⁵⁰ Furio, 1979, pp. 130f., 147ff.

⁵¹ Evelina Månsson, 1930, *passim*.

⁵² Furio, 1979, pp. 329ff.

Nor can we accept the view that the ethnic split and the dominance of Jewish and Italian workers in the garment industry and the UGWA as an explanation why other women and men did not join the union. There were few Jewish and Italian women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company and the locals of the UGWA in the Twin Cities were not led by Jewish or Italian workers. The garment workers who *did* join the unions in the Twin Cities represented both American women and immigrants, and they cooperated in the locals across ethnic boundaries. We do not know very much about Local 27 in Minneapolis, because its papers have not been found. A call for volunteers in 1922 as delegates from Local 27 to the Trades and Labor Assembly does, however, show that workers of both sexes and of several national groups took part in union work. The names of the volunteers reveal that workers, both men and women, of at least Swedish and Anglo(-American) descent were involved: Anna Carlson, Alice Scullion, Carl Engdahl, Mona Cragen, Harry Benson, Geo. Cooper, and Molly Tureen. Since “Sisters Snyder and Kreutzian” resigned as delegates, a woman of German descent was also involved.⁵³ Later on, Dora Kreutzian was even appointed secretary of the Central Labor Union of Minneapolis.

The names of the members of the board of Local 171 of the UGWA in St. Paul in 1917 exemplify even better that ethnicity did not matter for union work in the Twin Cities. Its president was of Swedish origin (Sigrid Thysell), its vice-president was of German descent (Lillian Kaufman), its record secretary Irish (Mary Corry), its sergeant of arms Finnish (Eva Kujawa), and its label custodian was of Austrian descent (Eliza Katzenmaier).⁵⁴ The financial secretary (Francis Gitzen) and the shop steward (Helen Jess) might have been of German descent as well. Indeed, the boards of Local 27 and Local 171 were two melting pots of immigrant women in the Twin Cities. Women of several national backgrounds were included and cooperated in the labor unions. In the Twin Cities it looks as if labor activists from different national backgrounds could “overcome the realities of ethnic differences and generations of prejudices” that Argersinger claims did not happen in New England.⁵⁵

⁵³Papers of Garment Workers, undated, 1918–1946, 1952–1955, *Central Labor Unions of Minneapolis and Hennepin County Archives*, Box 10, Location P. 320, MHS.

⁵⁴Minutes 1909–1917, p. 121, *Local 171 of the United Garment Workers of America in St. Paul Archives*, Location BD/1.U5G2, MHS.

⁵⁵Argersinger, 1999, pp. 70f.

Certainly, these unionized women were excluded from the establishment of the cities, though not due to their ethnic background but rather to their class position and their trade union activism.

The meager interest in unions among garment workers in Minneapolis, however, cannot be understood from a traditional gender perspective. It is true that the UCWA was mostly led by men and that its main organization, the AFL, was led by men who were more or less hostile to female workers in general. It is also true that trade unions in Minneapolis were dominated by men and that the male-dominated labor movement neglected female workers. Gender mattered generally within the garment industry and within the labor movement in Minneapolis by reason of the total dominance of male union members. Gender also mattered within locals 27 and 121 of the UGWA in the Twin Cities but in a quite different way than within the other unions: women dominated organized labor within the garment industry of the Twin Cities. So, there was no male hegemony or hostility within the garment workers' unions in the Twin Cities that can explain why thousands of female workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company did not join the union in the 1910s.

Although the directors of the company underlined that the work at their plant was not seasonal but permanent, several workers, especially women, considered their employment at the company as temporary. However, the temporary nature of the work was based on a life-cycle perspective rather than on the season of the year. There was generally in Minneapolis and beyond a "marriage bar" at work that did not encourage women to develop a long-term perspective on their work out of the home. In 1920, one-third of all women in Minneapolis married before 22.5 years of age, and the medium age was close to 25. The marriage age in Minneapolis, however, was three years higher than the average in the United States at the time, which Faue explains by the significant immigration to the city of women "in peak marriage years."⁵⁶ Still, quite a lot of the women at the Northwestern Knitting Company did enter the labor market while waiting to get married. The *Munsingwear News*, the monthly magazine that was distributed to all employees of the company, often proclaimed that females of "the Munsingwear Family" were leaving their employment because of marriage. For example, the first issue

⁵⁶Faue, 1991, pp. 32f.

announced that “Miss Clara Nelson left for her home in order to make preparations for her wedding which will take place some time during the month of December. Her future home will be in Cambridge, Minn.”⁵⁷ Hundreds of women were reported to leave the company when marrying, so generation and marital status, or rather expectations of a future as a home-working wife, did matter for many single women’s non-interest in unions.

Another thing that mattered in terms of female workers’ lack of interest in unions was their class position in a wider context. They did not always loosen their bonds with their families in the countryside of Minnesota or other states but instead returned to them for shorter or longer stays. The *Munsingwear News* often announced that a member of the “Munsingwear Family” was leaving that socially constructed family for her biological family beyond Minneapolis. Strangely enough, only women were announced in the magazine to be returning to their family homes, which indicates that only women were a problem regarding labor turnover. Several of these women were descendants of farmers, and they returned home to help their parents at harvest time. For instance, the readers could learn that “Alma Olson, Anna Bauman, Ella Roswell, Mayme Durham, Margaret Beyersdorff, Alma Lindahl and Mary Sherry left us to spend the summer on the farm.”⁵⁸ They had not totally loosened their family bonds, and they were not fully proletarianized but kept one foot in their original class of farmers. Their class location was nearly as much that of farmers as of workers.

Neither the “marriage bar” nor residual bonds with a non-industrial and non-capitalist background were, however, a special characteristic of Minneapolis or the garment industry in general. John Bodnar claims that “[t]housands of immigrants and a lesser number of blacks never intended to remain in industrial jobs permanently, and returned to their native countries or to their homes elsewhere in the United States whenever they could.”⁵⁹ So did Swedish labor migrant Evelina Johansdotter, and the women who worked for the Northwestern Knitting Company did not stand out in that respect. But, “labor turnover” seems to have been more than common at the company. It was, in fact, the most urgent

⁵⁷ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 6.

⁵⁸ *Munsingwear News*, August 1919, p. 25.

⁵⁹ Bodnar, 1982, p. 180.

problem for the directors in the 1910s, often discussed at the meetings of the board of directors and board of supervisors.⁶⁰ Bodnar claims that “transiency was an alternative to engaging in ideological or economic protest, which seems quite fruitless in the many instances where resources and power were overwhelmingly in the hands of others.”⁶¹ That was, however, a power relation that most employees experienced and that some nevertheless challenged. Certainly, skilled workers were in a better position to challenge the power of employers than semi-skilled and unskilled workers. So, women might have been more exposed than men to employers’ aggression against unionization, and thus they protested by leaving their employment instead of joining the union. On the other hand, no man working for the Northwestern Knitting Company joined the union either.

Even if the workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company were not unionized, the directors of the company were deeply involved in anti-union and anti-Socialist activities. In 1914, for instance, the *Minneapolis Labor Review* attacked the employers aggressively:

No longer does organized labor have to imagine who its enemies are, and to what measures the organized employers of Minneapolis will resort to break the union and starve the workers.

Organized labor now knows that the big banks, the big business men and the mayor, and through him the police, are lined up solidly against organized labor [. . .]

The charitable gentlemen who attended the West Hotel and joined the Citizen’s Alliance we give the list of herewith again. These men are a sample of the businessmen of Minneapolis who donate \$55,000 a year to the Associated Charities, and donate \$150,000 in fifteen minutes to keep the toilers and their families of Minneapolis in poverty and misery.⁶²

E. J. Couper, the first vice-president of the Northwestern Knitting Company, was named to be one of these “charitable gentlemen.”

In April 1918, the supervisory board discussed economic support to the *Minnesota Labor Press*, a paper that was considered “to be devoted principally to the combating of disloyalty and radical socialism.” One

⁶⁰More on that in Chapter 6.

⁶¹Bodnar, 1982, p. 180.

⁶²*Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 14, 1914, p. 1.

of the vice-presidents of the company, Kerr, stated that several prominent Minneapolis companies already supported the paper with \$100 to \$200 each, among them the First and Security National Bank, the Northwestern National Bank, the Pillsbury Flour Mills Co., the Minneapolis Steel and Machinery Co., and the Minneapolis Street Railway Co. It was delegated to Charles L. Pillsbury to investigate the matter before a decision was made. Nine days later, Pillsbury reported that, according to the Civic and Commerce Association, the principal promoter of the project “appeared to be in bad repute,” so the board decided not to contribute.⁶³

Instead, the supervisory board supported other newspaper actions. In April 1918, the board held a “special meeting” just

to consider a proposition submitted by the Minneapolis Tribune, whereby the Tribune proposes to publish a series of approximately twenty full page illustrated statements of printed matter without advertising, the purport of which is to combat socialism, disloyalty and labor unrest, and to encourage employees to remain at their posts serving the industries and thereby helping to win the war.⁶⁴

A week later, the directors decided to subscribe \$150.00 to the anti-labor campaign by the *Tribune*. They took more tangible steps, however, to prevent Socialists and other radicals from influencing the workers at its company. At the meeting where they turned down the proposal to support the Minnesota Labor Press, the directors discussed “the matter of detective service with respect to IWW activities, which, on his initiative [director Chatfield] has since February 20th been furnished us on a purely trial basis.” The service was provided by the Northern Information Bureau, and it was “unanimously decided that the service [was] important and worth the charge of \$50.00 per month,” so it should be continued.⁶⁵

⁶³Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 2 and April 11, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁶⁴Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 9, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁶⁵Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 11, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

If any workers at the company nevertheless considered engaging in labor activism, the directors hit back. Unfortunately, there is not much evidence regarding those steps, but in 1919, *The Minneapolis Labor Review* announced the efforts to organize garment workers in Minneapolis: “Organizer Thompson reported North Star and Northwestern Knitting Works laying off many workers to stop organizing.”⁶⁶ The directors’ strategy was successful. In 1937, organizer Sam Swanson reported that “in Minneapolis there is a firm, the Munsingwear, which has been a black spot in Mpls labor movement.”⁶⁷ In the following chapters, I will propose a few reasons why the Munsingites did not join the union in the 1910s.

⁶⁶ *The Minneapolis Labor Review*, January 10, 1919, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Papers of Garment Workers, undated, 1918–1946, 1952–1955, *Central Labor Unions of Minneapolis and Hennepin County Archives*, Box 10, p. 320, MHS.



CHAPTER 6

“The Munsingwear Family”: Industrial Welfare and Paternalism

INDUSTRIAL WELFARE IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN MINNEAPOLIS

In a historical review of the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1923, Charles L. Pillsbury stated that “many of the present officers and employees of the company have been in its service for many years; some of its women workers for more than twenty-five years.”¹ This statement, however, was more ideologically normative than based on facts. Certainly, several managers and mid-level officers had been in the company’s employ for many years, but few women had. In 1918, there were just about 100 women out of more than 2600, or in other words, 4%, who had reached the age of 40 and thus possibly could have been in the employ of the company for 25 years. Female white-collar workers in particular did not stay very long, since only one was aged 40 or more. Instead, labor turnover was a large problem, and the company managers had a variety of circumstances to consider when they tried to get the women to stay with the company.

Labor turnover and absenteeism were problems that faced many large employers in the early twentieth century as a result of their efforts to make production efficient according to the ideas of scientific management. The disadvantages for workers of these ideas had to

¹Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 8, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9 B, MHS.

be compensated for, and the industrial betterment movement, deeply paternalistic in its character, aimed at making workers more accepting of scientific management at work. Several managers of large and modern industrial plants established departments for employment and social welfare as part of a labor policy that sought to prevent workers from being absent from work, from leaving the workplace, and from establishing and/or joining independent trade unions. While scientific management was focused on the ways that the work was performed, industrial welfare programs were aimed at dealing with "the cultural, educational, recreational, medical, and financial aspects of workers' lives."² These welfare strategies had both a material and an ideological dimension.

In 1923, Louis A. Boettiger claimed that the "chief purpose" of employee welfare work was "to avert industrial conflict, to establish relations of mutual good-will between the management and the workers, and to aid in placing the business concerned upon a basis of maximum operating efficiency." Among other things, the motives for work aimed at employee welfare were to increase the productive efficiency, to reduce the labor turnover, to attract a desirable grade of labor, to reduce strikes and "labor difficulties," to "lull workers into a feeling of contentment with conditions which would otherwise be vigorously protested," to "provide palliatives for low wages," to "avert state regulation by furnishing an argument that it is not needed," to "disrupt the discipline of unionized labor," to benefit humanity, growing out of a "socialized conscience or a sense of social obligation," and to benefit the workers which again may be the product of a sense of duty, a "socialized conscience," or perhaps "a medieval belief" that good workers guarantee "the future welfare of the soul."³

David Montgomery announced two types of reforms for industrial employers to manage labor in general and immigrant workers in particular. First, "corporate welfare" should change "their employees' social attitudes, work habits, and life-styles." Specifically, it should "hasten the cultural transformation of the immigrants by promoting the attitudes of 'thrift, sobriety, adaptability, and initiative' that would allow employers to assign them easily to industrial tasks." Second, "professionalization of personnel management" aimed at developing "trained executives whose

²Greenwald, 1980, p. 47.

³Louis A. Boettiger, *Employee Welfare Work: A Critical and Historical Study*, New York, 1923, p. 1.

mission it was to cope with grievances arising at work and thus to stabilize and pacify the daily operations of the concern." This strategy was aimed at reducing work time losses and labor turnover in particular, and was also intended to eliminate labor disputes, reduce sickness and accidents, better the physical and social conditions of employees, develop an esprit de corps, and encourage the Americanization of immigrants.⁴

There was also a gender perspective on the role of corporate welfare. Kessler-Harris claims that the "paternalism, benevolence, and welfare," which employers "offered in compensation for foregoing unionism proved to be particularly useful tools for diverting women from organization." These employers held out the prospect of alleviating some of "the harsh conditions under which women worked." She concludes that company-based social benefits were considered by several women as an alternative to unionization.⁵

The First World War seems to have been "a sudden spur" for the establishment of industrial welfare programs in the United States.⁶ Greenwald maintains that the war "helped to forge a union between the scientific management of work and the cultivation of human relations." The underlying idea was that "employers' active concern for the health and welfare of their workers would improve employees' loyalty and morals, promote congenial management-labor relations, and discourage the growth of trade unionism." Although employed by the company, the social secretary was to serve as "the bridge between capital and labor."⁷

In 1919, the United States Department of Labor reported that many employers "of late" had been "impressed by the fact that a large turnover [was] a very important item in the cost of production." Consequently, many industrial employers "have been seeking to reduce this turnover by more scientific management of the employment departments and by the introduction of welfare features."⁸ In some companies, an

⁴Montgomery, 1977, pp. 96f.

⁵Kessler-Harris, 2003, pp. 163f.

⁶Greenwald, 1980, p. 52.

⁷Greenwald, 1980, pp. 51f.

⁸*Welfare Work for Employees in Industrial Establishments in the United States*, US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin No. 250, Washington, 1919, p. 120.

employment or a labor department was established “with responsibility for the recruitment, selection, instruction and discharge of workers.” It was an important goal of these departments “to remove control over certain employment duties from the hands of foremen and invest these tasks in a new managerial elite who would presumably be more amenable to company direction and would work with greater rigor and precision.”⁹ At the Northwestern Knitting Company, W. L. Elson was hired for that purpose in June 1919. His slogan was: “Specialized effort to determine what each applicant for work can best do well should do much to solve production problems.”¹⁰ Certainly, Elson and his colleagues of this “managerial elite” of industrial secretaries had a tighter closeness to the company directors than foremen and foreladies used to have.

More than any other employer in the world, Henry Ford symbolizes the new industrial welfare programs intended to counteract labor turnover and other negative aspects of scientific management. The Five Dollar Day program, according to Hooker “the most famous labor-management reform in the annals of American business,” implied new labor relations in many respects. The program was initiated in 1913.¹¹ Meyer concludes that it became “a formidable instrument for the social control of the Ford workers.” The basic idea was the profit sharing between capital and labor, which implied that an employee could get extra reimbursement on top of the wage, if he was considered by the sociological department to deserve it. The program, though, only included “married men of any age, single men over twenty-two, and single men under twenty-two with dependents.”¹²

The Ford welfare program focused on male breadwinners, so gender played a central role in the program and its basic ideology that reinforced the idea of the family wage and the male breadwinner philosophy. Martha May concludes that “Ford attempted to link the lives of the workers in the factory with their lives at home, with a specific form

⁹Greenwald, p. 53.

¹⁰*Munsingwear News*, July 1919, p. 6.

¹¹Clarence Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of Crystal Palace, 1910–1927: Ford Workers in the Model T Era*, Bowling Green, 1997, p. 110.

¹²Stephen Meyer III, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908–1921*. New York, 1981, pp. 108, 114f., 117 and 140; Hooker, 1997, pp. 110ff.

of family structure."¹³ For him, both productivity and profits were promoted if "the male workers could earn better living conditions, a decent home life, and a dependent family." Indirectly, the Five Dollar Day recognized that women's domestic labor contributed to a "stable and secure family life."¹⁴

Ideas of industrial welfare programs were developed also by large employers in Minneapolis as part of their anti-unionism. The Citizens Alliance's "aggressive campaign to spread the open shop was only the first step in creating a union-free city," but its spokespersons realized that "the evils of unionism would inevitably reappear," if workers were "mistreated and alienated from their employers." In 1914, the Committee of Industrial Welfare of the Civic and Commerce Association consequently prepared "plans for profit sharing, stock purchasing by employees, insurance, pensions, and mutual benefit associations to address these problems." In 1915, the committee "offered interested companies assistance in installing the new, innovative programs" that should be "kept free from the spirit of paternalism, benevolence or the suggestion of an ulterior end" in order to have "a binding influence for good." The Washburn-Crosby Company was one of the first companies to establish such a program, and Millikan concludes that this "flour-milling giant [...] was able to stave off union recognition until 1936."¹⁵

The Northwestern Knitting Company was another company to develop a plan to "stave off union recognition." In contrast to the Ford Motor Company and the Washburn-Crosby Company, most workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company were women, which makes its program extra interesting, because its program could not be based on the male family bread winner ideology. As far as I know there are no scholarly works in the US historiography on a company welfare program directed at female workers. So, let us turn back to "the garment giant" to have a closer look at its directors' way of making its employees affiliated with the company.

¹³Martha May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: The Ford Motor Company and the Five Dollar Day," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 8: 2, 1982, pp. 399–424, 409.

¹⁴May, 1982, pp. 416f.

¹⁵Millikan, 2001, p. 53. In Minnesota, also the Duluth & Iron Range Railroad developed a wide program of industrial welfare capitalism. See Engren, 2007, ch. 8.

LABOR TURNOVER, INDUSTRIAL WELFARE AND PATERNALISM IN "THE MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY"

Bonus and Profit Sharing

After the 1914 strike by female workers at the Northwestern Knitting Company, although limited in size and intensity, the directors knew that women *might* go on strike and stop production even without a union. Just the possibilities of future strikes and unionization of the workers were good reasons for the directors to make the workers more affiliated with the company. But there was another, more tangible and more immediate reason for doing so.

Labor turnover was on the agenda of the directors' board and the supervisory board all through the 1910s. Labor turnover not only caused a lot of economic costs and energy for recruiting new workers and losses due to low efficiency, when new workers were trained for their future tasks. In addition, one of the supervisors maintained that "the presence of large numbers of new operators on any operation was disadvantageous for the reason that the preponderance of new operators tended to depress and discourage even the old and experienced workers."¹⁶ The efficiency engineer J. E. Smith concluded a debate on labor turnover in 1920 by stating that, with the same number of employees, efficiency and consequently production could be increased by 40% if the labor turnover could be reduced "to *normal*," which he considered to be 10–12%.¹⁷

Labor turnover was a problem all through the year, but special attention was paid by the directors to the problems of getting workers back to work after the summer break. In 1910, Stowell, the company president, made his colleagues aware of the fact

that the experience of the company in the past years has shown that a considerable percentage of employees do not return, thereby rendering it necessary to find substitutes, and imposing upon the company not only the

¹⁶Minutes of Meeting of Division Heads and Supervisors on March 25, 1920, p. 4, Supervisory Board Minutes, January 9, 1920–April 29, 1921, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

¹⁷Minutes of Meeting of Division Heads and Supervisors on March 25, 1920, p. 4, Supervisory Board Minutes, January 9, 1920–April 29, 1921, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

trouble and inconvenience of instructing the substitutes, but a distinct loss on account of diminished and inferior production.¹⁸

Stowell told his colleagues that it would be "both wise and just to recompense experienced employees for faithfulness and continuance in service, so that such recompense might, in a measure, assume the aspect of profit-sharing with the employees." Obviously, he convinced them to inaugurate a recompense system for "faithful" employees. Four days later a notice was made public in the plant to inform all employees of the conditions. The Munsingites could learn that:

It is the earnest desire of this Company to retain as long as possible all competent and experienced help. The continual educating of new help is a source of very considerable expense. In view of these facts, it is our intention to make it a desirable thing from the employee's standpoint to remain in our service for long-continued periods. To do this, we have formulated a plan with the idea of distributing among old and faithful employees, certain sums of money rather than spend such sums continually on the educating of new help. The entire object of the plan is to promote the desirability of long-continued service, that is, to make it as desirable a thing from the employee's standpoint as it is from the standpoint of the Company.¹⁹

In detail, the directors offered workers who were in the employ of the company prior to January 1, 1910, and who returned to work after the summer break, "when sent for," and remained continuously at work until the end of 1910 "a sum equal to 5% of their total net earnings of the period mentioned." The additional payment would be granted only to employees who had been in "continuous service of the Company" for a full calendar year. It was even clarified that an employee who earned \$1.00 per day would earn another \$12.50 for a full year's work.

Those workers, who had been employed during January, February, and March in 1910 and stayed at work continuously through March 1911 would be paid 5% extra in April 1911. Those who were employed

¹⁸Minutes of Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held June 25, 1910, Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Record Book, 1910-1919, p. 20, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887-1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

¹⁹Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held June 25, 1910, Secretary's Record Book, 1910-1919, p. 21, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887-1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

in April, May, and June 1910 and stayed through June 1911 would also get 5% extra after that period ended. Corresponding arrangements were made for those who started to work in July through September and October through December 1910.

Only sickness and necessary temporary lay-offs due to "insufficient supply of work" were accepted as excuses for not being at work every workday of the year. In both cases of accepted reasons for absence, the employee was to "fill out and sign a form" that would be accepted by the foreman of the department and turned into the paymaster's office when the employee was sent for to resume work. In the event of prolonged sickness, the company management had "the privilege of demanding a physician's certificate as to the necessity of such long-continued absence from work." Foremen, though, could accept other reasons for absence that would not exclude the employee from the bonus, so they still had some influence over workers.

The directors' program for getting a stable and continuous labor force at the company did not work to their total satisfaction, however. On May 15, 1913, Stowell once again announced that irregular attendance to work was "a source of loss both to employer and employee." In order to "promote constant attendance to work," the directors offered an "Attendance Premium" to loyal workers, which was much more generous to them than the program of 1910.

Commencing May 16th, 1913, a premium of 5% will be added to the earnings of employees at the *end of each semi-monthly pay period* for constant attendance on each working day of that period, subject to the following conditions.

Constant attendance shall mean that an employee shall be at work during the regular working hours established by the Company on *each and every day of the semi-monthly period*.

No excuse for inattendance will be accepted, with the exception that the fact of there being insufficient work on any operation for full time attendance shall not operate to deprive an employee of the benefits of this premium. No foreman or other agent of the Company has any authority to change this provision. A registration of leaving work at any hour, other than the regular closing hour, on any employee's clock card will disqualify such employee from the premium for that period. In event that it becomes necessary on account of insufficient work for any employee to leave before regular closing hours it will be necessary that the department foreman shall *adjust the time clock* for such employees so that the registration of their leaving time

will be in a *special column* on the card. If you are excused for this reason be sure that the foreman has adjusted the clock before you register your time as no excuses will be accepted for failure to observe this requirement.²⁰

Obviously, the first program—to bind workers for a year—was unsuccessful, and the directors announced that the program of 1910 was “abrogated” and that the new one was established “in lieu thereof.” In fact, the directors had to decrease their ambitions and accept that the workers worked “faithfully” for the company for just two weeks, but then not even sickness was accepted as an excuse for getting the attendance premium. Their motives for the program were, however, the same as in 1910:

This premium will make a substantial increase in the earnings of faithful and conscientious workers and the Company will be gratified if a very large portion of its employees are eligible to payment of this premium on each pay-day. It would be a great satisfaction if we might have at least a few pay-days out of the year when *every person* was entitled to and received this premium.²¹

However, the bonus program was not developed for every employee at the company, since just one part of the employees obviously seems to have caused a problem in not attending work to the directors’ satisfaction:

This proposition applies to employees of the manufacturing division of this Company’s business only, and not to employees in any way connected with the selling division. It does not include any employees engaged in any office or clerical work nor foremen or heads of departments nor any employee whose remuneration for service is figured on a monthly basis.²²

²⁰Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held June 20, 1913, Secretary’s Records Book, 1910–1919, p. 83, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

²¹Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held June 20, 1913, Secretary’s Records Book, 1910–1919, p. 83, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887–1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

²²Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held June 20, 1913, Secretary’s Records Book, 1910–1919, p. 83, *Munsingwear*

Thus, only blue-collar workers were considered to be such a labor turnover problem that they had to be granted an extra payment for working loyally for the company.

The directors had such high expectations of the new bonus program that they spend both the extra bonus and extra costs for administering the program. Due to "the immense amount of additional work for the payroll department" that was expected to be an effect of the new attendance premium it would be necessary for the employees in the payroll department to devote an additional day "for making up the payroll."²³

Unlike blue-collar workers, white-collar workers seem to have worked to the satisfaction of the managers without getting any extra earnings for coming to work every day. Since most of the workers of the premium program were women, we might believe that labor turnover was primarily a gender problem. This might have been the case, but there is no evidence for such a conclusion, because male blue-collar workers were also included in the program, while many female white-collar workers were not. Nor was it a matter of ethnicity, generation, or marital status, since women and men of different ethnic background, of different ages and of different marital status were included in the program that aimed at making blue-collar workers more "faithful" and "conscientious" to the company. In the eyes of the directors, "the labor problem" was a matter of class.

However, the directors did not give up their ambitions to keep the workers at work for a full year. So, beyond the two weeks' premium, they decided to "inaugurate an attendance premium" of 5% of the total net earnings of the year "to be paid to such employees as should remain continuously in the employ of the company from January 1st to December 31st." Likewise, such a premium should be paid to employees, "who should remain continuously in the employ of the company for one year after their entrance during each quarter year, ending April 1st, July 1st, October 1st, and January 1st." More than anything else, this attendance premium was intended as an inducement to employees to come back to work after the annual summer break. Once again company president Stowell's justification

Inc., Records 1887-1979, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

²³Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held June 20, 1913, Secretary's Records Book, 1910-1919, p. 84, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887-1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

for the premium was that it would be both just and wise "to recompense experienced employees for faithfulness and continuance in service." In a way, he argued, such recompense "might in a measure assume the aspect of profit sharing with the employees."²⁴

The problems of getting workers to take employment or to stay with of the company increased after war broke out in Europe and emigration of Europeans to the United States was reduced; it ceased when the US entered the war. Consequently, the competition over labor between employers increased substantially. Half a year after the entry of the United States into the war, when the Northwestern Knitting Company expanded dramatically due to the state contract for underwear for soldiers, the matter was discussed by the directors. The company president Stowell suggested

that the loyalty of the large body of factory employees should be recognized and its continuance encouraged [...] the president was authorized to announce, at such time or times as in his judgment will be wise, a further emergency contribution to such employees, by the company, in an aggregate amount not exceeding ten percent of the monthly earnings of the various employees according to the basic needs in force.²⁵

In wartime, however, white-collar workers also seem to have become a labor turnover problem for the company directors. It looks as if they worried especially about getting white-collar workers back after the summer break, and they maintained that a paid summer vacation could be a way of keeping them loyal to the company; that proposition was not considered for blue-collar workers. In April 1918, the supervisory board decided "that all employees on the monthly payroll, who entered the service prior to November 1st be allowed a full two weeks' vacation during the following summer; that those entering the service subsequent to November 1st and prior to March 1st receive one week's vacation during the following summer," while those who entered the service after March

²⁴Appendix to Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, Secretary's Book 1910 to July 1919, *Munsingwear Inc., Records 1887-1979*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

²⁵Minutes of a Special Meeting of Directors of Northwestern Knitting Company, held October 4, 1917, Secretary's Book 1910 to July 1919, p. 189, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

I should not receive any paid vacation until the next year. In each case, the vacations should be “allowed with full pay and each division head [should] lay out his own schedule so as to determine the times when the vacation should take place with respect to the monthly salaried employees of his division such that the Company’s business shall be interfered with to the least extent.” In all cases the vacations should be determined prior to September 1.²⁶ The next day, however, on recommendation of Charles L. Pillsbury, the vacations were extended so that every office employee got some paid vacation. One weekday was offered for every full month at work, with the maximum of 12 weekdays. Director Kirschstein, though, wanted the board to be more restrictive than this. He proposed “that vacations should not be allowed to those employees who were permanently leaving the Company during the vacation period,” which was regulated to start on May 1 and end on September 1. The board, however, said that “this matter should depend upon the individual case, and should be left to the discretion of the various division heads.”²⁷

Regarding the summer vacation in 1918 the board decided that the factory should close down on August 8 “at the usual hour” and start again on Monday, August 19. It was understood, however, that “all the work being done for the U.S. Government will continue without interruption.”²⁸

Certainly, the efforts by the company directors to make employees stay with the company for a longer time were free from “the spirit of paternalism, benevolence or the suggestion of an ulterior end” that the Committee of Industrial Welfare of the Civic and Commerce Association in Minneapolis recommended in 1914. They did, however, ask for appreciation and something in return for their generosity toward the employees. In October 1917, the company president asked for the acceptance

²⁶Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 8, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7B, MHS.

²⁷Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 16, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7B, MHS.

²⁸Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, June 8, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7B, MHS.

by the employees of the emergency bonus that the directors offered the employees due to the period of high prices at the time. Stowell acknowledged that the directors were "led to the conclusion that in *your interest (which is always identical with ours)* the question of your earning capacity must have our careful and thoughtful attention" (my italics). He complained about the "very strenuous and uncertain times for all of us," but still he proclaimed:

We realize, however, your abnormally high living cost, and we are determined to assist you in meeting it *to the limit of our ability and as long as we can. In return, we ask only your continued support, confidence and cooperation.* It is our earnest desire to be as loyal to you at all times as we expect you to be to us. (my italics)²⁹

Starting with the wage pay period of October 1–14, the emergency bonus that was established for all employees was to be increased from 10 to 15% of total earnings. The directors, though, had the right to reduce or to withdraw any such extra payment "at any time when conditions may render it necessary or desirable to do so." Stowell completed his message by saying that the directors and the officers of the company wanted to "express their sincere appreciation of the faithful service rendered by its loyal employees [*sic*]." These words by the company president to the employees can be compared to his concluding remarks to the stockholders that the fiscal year of 1917 was "the most satisfactory year" that the company had ever had (above p. 62).

Moreover, one of the basic characters of the Munsingwear ideology was that no employee who did not succeed in advancing at work should blame anyone other than themselves. The *Munsingwear News* introduced a special column—the "Questions and Answers Column"—to clarify the ideological order of the company and, implicitly, the social order of capitalism. The anonymous editor of the column gave this advice:

If you are passed by without being given a chance for advancement, analyze yourself. Are you capable of filling the advanced position? Are your qualifications the ones which are necessary in the person required to fill such a position. If they are not, see what can be done to remedy them.³⁰

²⁹ *Munsingwear News*, November 1917, p. 11.

³⁰ *Munsingwear News*, August 1919, p. 14.

The editor assured the employee who did not advance that the foreman or supervisor would give their reasons for not promoting that employee. “Without question,” the editor claimed, “he has a reason. He will, no doubt, give you his reason and you will be in a position to improve yourself for the next chance.”

There were, however, a few employees who were beyond doubt in being trustful and having personal qualifications. They were gratified in another and more substantial way than the rank-and-file employees for being loyal to the company. At their meeting on January 4, 1910, the directors proposed—partly “as good business policy”—to issue up to 1500 shares of capital and sell them to some special employees. These shares were to “be sold, in the discretion of the directors, to employees of the company holding positions of importance and responsibility.” They were not transferable to anyone else but back to the company. If any of these special employee stockholders should leave the company or die, the stocks should be transferred back to the company and possibly be reissued and sold to other employees who held important and responsible positions.³¹ A few days later, the stockholders unanimously adopted the proposal and by-laws of the “Employees’ Special Stock,”³² where shares were to be registered.

Certainly, these qualified employees were not the men of drafting age that two of the directors of the company, E. J. Couper and Charles L. Pillsbury, tried to get exempted from the draft in June 1917 due to their importance to the company.³³ Instead, the following “employees” were offered the chance to buy stocks at a price of \$125 per share, if they wanted: M. A. James, M. B. Kerr, F. Chatfield, and J. A. Struthers 250 shares each, W. B. Morris 200 shares, F. E. Struthers 100 shares, E. R. Jones 50 shares, H. McGregor, W. G. Wheeler, Edward Jackson, J. D. Niles, and J. C. McKercher 20 shares each, Iver Oas and E. Lowery 15 shares each, and W. E. Dickinson and E. Hanson 10 shares each.³⁴

³¹Extracts from Minutes of Directors and Stockholders’ Meetings in The Northwestern Knitting Co., 1887–1925, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 5, 1:134, Location 148.G.11.3 (B), MHS.

³²Minutes of Meeting of Stockholders, January 15, 1910, Secretary’s Book 1910–1919, pp. 11ff., *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1B, MHS.

³³I will develop those efforts in Chapter 9.

³⁴Minutes of Meeting of Directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company, held January 15, 1910, Secretary’s Record Book, 1910–July 1919, p. 18, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

In 1917, Kerr was one of the vice-presidents of the company and its sales director, while Chatfield was another vice-president and general works manager. Frank Struthers was service manager until March 1918, when he resigned from the company.³⁵ William B. Morris was advertising director in 1917. Niles was supervisor of the sewing departments, Iver Oas was foreman at the knitting department, Eugene Lowery was supervisor of the winding and knitting departments, and E. E. Hanson was voucher clerk. James and Struthers had no positions in the organization chart of December 1, 1917, and Jones, McGregor, Wheeler, and Dickinson were not on the payroll of the company in 1920, so the strategy for keeping all these trusted men obviously did not work out completely.

Edward Jackson is the only one of the mid-level managers that I found a little more information on. He was employed in the boxing department in 1901 and worked as foreman of the pressing and boxing departments at least from the beginning of 1916. First, he advanced to foreman and then to supervisor. As such he was titled "Czar of the Locker Room."³⁶ In 1920, Jackson had advanced to being supervisor of several departments and registered on the payroll of middle-range managers and supervisors.³⁷ In many respects, Edward Jackson stands out as a symbol of the men who ought to be rewarded by the directors of the company for their loyalty and responsibility to the company. He made a career from being a blue-collar worker before moving to the position of mid-level manager. Moreover, he was a symbol of the gender division of work: he pursued a career that was open to men but, in general, not to women, but he did not reach the very top of the company. He supervised the work of many women and some men, he earned more than most women could dream of, and he could exercise a significant amount of power over a considerable number of other employees. Indeed, he made an ideal employee to expose to everyone else as evidence that hard work and loyalty could open up a career.

³⁵March 6, 1918. Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

³⁶*Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 14.

³⁷The Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Rolls Reports, Munsingwear Inc., June 1920, p. 1 (1–9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

From the list of gratified “deserving” men of the company we can conclude that not only class but also gender and ethnicity mattered regarding “trusted employees.” No woman was trusted or considered to be faithful and conscientious and with the exception of Iver Oas (Norwegian) and E. E. Hanson (Swedish), all share-takers were Anglo-American men. Moreover, the top officers of the company, all of them of Anglo descent, had the opportunity to buy the vast majority of the shares, while others were offered only very small numbers. To prevent any provocative claims from employees, the advertising manager William B. Morris “was elected [by the directors of the company!] as a representative of the employee stockholders of the company.”³⁸ Once again, the Anglo-American paternalism of the company is evidenced, and class, gender, and ethnicity mattered for the possibilities of profit sharing with the stockholders.

THE MUNSINGWEAR INDUSTRIAL WELFARE PROGRAM

In February 1914, the directors took another step in the advancement of the “new features of industrial betterment” at the company. A local newspaper reported on the initiative:

The company has recently engaged a young woman to act as Industrial Secretary, and is planning to greatly increase the facilities for social enjoyment among the employees. In addition to the large dining room, which has been maintained for a number of years, and a hospital and rest room, it is planned to provide a gymnasium, also an auditorium where the various clubs that have been organized among the employees can find a suitable place for their meetings.³⁹

The hiring of an industrial secretary was an indication of the directors’ ambitions to develop an industrial welfare program. Hiring her was a way of preparing for the expansion of the company in connection with the opening of the new eight-story industrial complex. Since the number of

³⁸Minutes of Meeting of Directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company, June 20, 1913, Secretary’s Book 1910–1919, p. 80, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 30, Location 148.C.14.1 (B), MHS.

³⁹F. M. Stowell’s scrapbook, p. 13. Clipping from an anonymous newspaper, *Munsingwear Inc., Records, 1887–1979*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

employees at the Northwestern Knitting Company increased dramatically between 1914 and 1918, the position as industrial secretary was expanded into a social service department. On June 2, 1918, the supervisors discussed "employing Girls in Service Department" to take care of the increasing number of employees. The matter was referred to Service Manager Norman.⁴⁰ Obviously, even the caring activities of the company were headed by a man, even a man of foreign descent.

Miss Baird's work in the industrial service department was highly valued by the company directors. And, indeed, employment management, or personnel management, expanded significantly in the United States during and after the war as a complement to scientific management. Clarence Hooker concludes that the introduction of employment departments in capitalist companies implied a centralization of employment and "ultimately, the department became responsible for all phases of labor relations."⁴¹ From the very beginning it was considered to be "both more receptive to women and to catch their imaginations in ways which engineering and business management had not." Social work was obviously a maternal task, and women should deal with women in that respect.⁴²

In 1920, it was officially announced that Miss Baird was ready to "assist any girl in the plant, who may have problems to solve." These problems could either "pertain to her relationship to the work or to her living conditions in a strange city."⁴³ Miss Baird, and her two assistants, certainly exemplify women in the 1910s, who managed welfare and employment departments in factories where large numbers of women were employed. Several such women had their roots in social settlement work and cooperated with settlement houses to bridge class divides and ethnic animosity.⁴⁴ Miss Baird and her assistants had that background.

The employment of industrial secretaries implied changed gendered power relations at the company. By being responsible for hiring employees, industrial secretaries were given power over employees that foremen had before. "By modern standards," says Daniel Nelson, "the foreman's

⁴⁰June 2, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7B, MHS.

⁴¹Hooker, 1997, p. 110.

⁴²Hartman Strom, 1992, pp. 109ff.

⁴³*Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 17.

⁴⁴Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 112.

empire was a formidable realm” in the late nineteenth century, and a foreman had “virtually complete responsibility for the men and women in his department or area.”⁴⁵ To be employed and/or promoted was too often the result of bribes or gifts, which might have “ominous implications in an establishment with male foremen and female operatives.”⁴⁶ At the Northwestern Knitting Company, foremen were not only dispossessed of the power of employing workers but also the responsibility of training female workers for work at the company and the quality work that female teachers and inspectors practiced in the plant. By taking over the power of employment and promotion of employees, industrial secretaries could even promote female factory workers to forewomen, move operatives into office work, and train working-class women to be supervisors.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, we cannot conclude for sure that this happened at the Northwestern Knitting Company, but certainly several women were promoted to foreladies, inspectors, and white-collar workers.

The Cafeteria

In his historical review of the company in 1923, Charles L. Pillsbury maintained that the directors focused very much on physical working conditions and on taking care of the employees. “Most of the employees eat their noon lunches, and other meals as well, in the company’s spacious and sanitary cafeteria,” he proudly claimed. It was served by “one of the best equipped hotel type kitchens in Minneapolis, and [it was] in charge of an expert chef.”⁴⁸

The company directors belonged to the group of employers who were “anxious to make certain that the lunch hour was taken with dispatch.” Some employers in the United States had noticed that “[t]he temptations to wander leisurely around town in search of food and to shop during the lunch hour often resulted in late employees, so providing lunch services on the premises gave employers more control”

⁴⁵Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–1920*, Madison, 1975, pp. 34 and 36.

⁴⁶Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 132.

⁴⁷Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 132.

⁴⁸Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 3, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9B, MHS.

over the employees.⁴⁹ In fact, the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company exemplify a wider tendency among progressive industrial capitalists in the nation, which the Minneapolis branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) highlighted five years earlier:

Two hundred and twenty two companies in the United States are known to have established employees' lunch rooms with part of the space set aside for rest and recreation. These are patronized by 63% of the women employees.⁵⁰

The YWCA surveyor in Minneapolis, Mary Rogers Lane, however, noticed that lunch rooms in the city were established primarily by department stores, large offices, electrical firms, and telephone companies, while "those lines of business, such as factories, railroads, traction companies and car shops, located in the outlying districts [...] have with rare exceptions, neglected to provide lunch rooms."⁵¹

Obviously, the Northwestern Knitting Company was one of these rare exceptions. In 1903, eleven years before the new plant was opened, Esther M. Erickson of the YWCA reported from a short visit to the plant that it had "a lunchroom where the girls [could] go to eat their lunch" and get some coffee.⁵² The employees themselves probably had to bring what they wanted to eat, but they did not have to leave the plant for their lunch break and be tempted to "wander leisurely around town" searching for food or shopping. It cannot be determined whether coffee was served just to the women at work or to the men as well. Probably only women were considered to be a problem due to their

⁴⁹Hartman Strom, 1992, pp. 121f.

⁵⁰Mary Rogers Lane, "Women and Girls Employed Outside of Home," p. 85, Survey 1919, Vol. 2. *Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota.

⁵¹Mary Rogers Lane, "Women and Girls Employed Outside of Home," p. 85, Survey 1919, Vol. 2. *Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota.

⁵²"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, pp. 113f., *Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota.

wandering leisurely around, but some men certainly might have stayed at a bar over another beer, which did not encourage efficient working after lunch.

The lunchroom in the new building that Pillsbury, for good reasons, was so proud of was of another dignity. The “Culinary Department” had opened in December 1915, and the new “Cafeteria Chef, assistants and equipment furnished one surprise after another.” The chef had “spent 20 years in his line of work,” so he had “a great deal of experience” and his ability was assured to be “beyond any possible doubt.” Also the physical environment and the high-standard fully equipped kitchen were of quality.⁵³

In 1919, the *Munsingwear News* published two more pictures of the cafeteria, where everything “from soup to nuts” was offered to employees.⁵⁴ Indeed, the cafeteria was rather a kitchen with a restaurant of a very good standard. Director Pillsbury did not, however, hint officially to anyone why the directors invested so largely in a restaurant for employees. Certainly, they had something in mind (Fig. 6.1).

Miss Lane of the Minneapolis branch of the YWCA concluded in her report that there were great advantages for employers in providing a lunchroom, and she reflected about possible incentives for employers to organize good lunches for employees at reasonable prices. She maintained that it was an open question among employers “whether lunch [...] stabilizes the labor force” or not, but the ambitions to establish such rooms were “seldom if ever” given up. The main reasons for establishing lunch rooms and rest rooms were that they offset “the tendency of workers to cut down the noon meal on account of its expense,” because they were economical due to “the cafeteria method of serving” and because good food was sold “at a minimum of cost.” Moreover, employees were “apt to neglect the assembling of a satisfactory noon meal to bring from home in the morning,” and lunch rooms afforded “an opportunity for those who do bring the major portion of a luncheon to supplement it with hot soup, solid food or beverage.” Certainly, women at work at the Northwestern Knitting Company would not just have a cup of tea for lunch! Miss Lane claimed that the employees were “well nourished and therefore more efficient,” and

⁵³ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, pp. 2, 4–5.

⁵⁴ *Munsingwear News*, January 1919, p. 17.



Fig. 6.1 The Munsingwear Cafeteria, 1921. Photographer: C. J. Hibbard. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

she added that “their absences on account of indigestion, constipation and sickness [were] greatly reduced.” She maintained that a good and healthy lunch decreased “the hazards of industrial accident and disease.”⁵⁵ Of course, no beer was served!

Miss Lane also noted that not only a good and healthy lunch was favorable for both the employees and the employers. A recreation room adjacent to the restaurant was of great value for both parties, especially for the “recreation or relaxation of employees in the spare minutes of

⁵⁵Mary Rogers Lane, “Women and Girls Employed Outside of Home,” pp. 86 and 88, Survey 1919, Vol. 2, *Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota. See also *Welfare Work for Employees in Industrial Establishments in the United States*, 1919, p. 55.

the noon hour.”⁵⁶ So, the investment at the Northwestern Knitting Company increased the reputation of the company as a considerate employer and at the same time increased efficiency at work and, in the end, profits for the shareholders.

The Employee's Mutual Benefit Association

The Employees' Mutual Benefit Association of the Northwestern Knitting Company (EMBA), established on June 1, 1915, was a cornerstone of the industrial welfare program at the company. The constitution and by-laws clarify that the object of the association was “to relieve its members, in case of sickness or injury, which may unfit them for their daily labor, and to assist in defraying burial expenses of members.”⁵⁷ It is quite obvious that one main reason for the employer to establish the EMBA was the introduction of the workmen's compensation act in Minnesota in 1913, which implied that the employer had to provide medical, surgical, and hospital treatment for the first 90 days of disability to work and to report to the labor commissioner on all accidents that disabled the employee for one week or more (Chapter 2). Simultaneously, the directors made it a basic part of the new company paternalism.

According to article V of the constitution, the affairs of the association should be supervised and controlled by a board that was composed of the officers of the association, six elected members, and the industrial secretary of the company, who served “ex officio.”

From the start in 1915, Miss Jessie Copeland, 31 years of age,⁵⁸ was elected president, while Minnie Means, aged 36 and a widow in 1918, was elected vice-president, and the 24-year-old Miss Viola E. Wolford served as secretary. One man, Iver Oas, was elected treasurer.⁵⁹ According to the survey of women at work in 1918, Miss Copeland and

⁵⁶Mary Rogers Lane, “Women and Girls Employed Outside of Home,” pp. 86 and 88, Survey 1919, Vol. 2, *Young Women's Christian Association Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota.

⁵⁷Article II of Constitution, Frederick M. Stowell's scrapbook, 1913–1932, p. 54, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

⁵⁸Ages of female officers determined from the survey of women at work in 1918.

⁵⁹*Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 9.

Mrs. Means were inspectors, while Miss Wolford was involved in industrial service; Miss Copeland and Miss Wolford were still in the employ of the company in 1920, so they served it for more than five years. All of them were born in the United States and claimed American nationality, so although there is no information on who elected these officers, we can conclude that only American women were trusted in these important positions at the company. Oas, however, was of Norwegian descent, but he was considered by the directors of the company to be such a trustworthy man that he was one of the few "deserved employees," who had a chance to earn some extra money from the profit-sharing program.

According to article VI of the constitution, the EMBA president was to sign all checks drawn against its funds. Candidates for membership should submit their applications to the secretary, who had to "keep a correct list of all active members," "keep a careful record of members to whom benefits are paid and of the circumstances of each case, and make out all the orders on the Treasurer." The treasurer took care of all the fees and deposited all money of the association "in a bank designed by the Directors," and, with the president, he signed all checks and paid "all orders regularly issued and attested by the president and the secretary."

The elected members of the board were chosen from four departments: one from the cutting departments, two from the finishing departments, one from the knitting and spooling departments, and one from the boxing and pressing department. So, only blue-collar workers were elected to the board, although article III of the constitution said that "[a]ny person in the employ of the Northwestern Knitting Company for a minimum period of one month [was] eligible to membership in the Association." There was a membership committee for each department, but it looks as if the company directors put most energy into getting the female blue-collar workers to become members of the association. White-collar workers did, however, join the EMBA; in the first published list of beneficiaries one female office worker, and one man, were reported among 30 female blue-collar workers who received sick benefits.⁶⁰ Each month, the *Munsingwear News* published the names of beneficiaries and the sum of the benefit each member received, probably to convince their workmates of the advantages of a membership in the association.

⁶⁰ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 9.

In March 1919, the *Munsingwear News* published statistics of membership in the EMBA. Altogether, there were 1618 members out of 3903 employees on the payroll of February 1, 1919 (according to the company magazine), i.e. 41% of the employees had joined the association. Another 304 joined it during the succeeding month. Membership varied significantly between departments. Among blue-collar workers the membership degree varied from 30% in the pressing department to 83% in the drying department, while no more than 9% of the office employees had joined the EMBA. Thus, blue-collar workers seem to have been more interested in protecting themselves in case of illness or injury. The editor of the *Munsingwear News* was, however, one of the office employees who had joined the association, since she was granted benefits in February 1919. Simultaneously, she tried to convince more “Munsingites” to join the association and persuade members to observe the rules. She underlined that only six applications for benefit were not granted, and the reasons for these refusals were that members failed to report illness until they came back to work or that they did not approach a licensed physician.⁶¹

Obviously, the propaganda for the EMBA was successful. In December 1919, the *Munsingwear News* declared that no less than 83.6% of all employees at the company were members of the association. In the winding, knitting, and cutting departments and the print shop every single employee was involved in the program, while just 78.5% of those in the examining, pressing, and boxing departments were. The employees in the finishing department likewise showed limited interest. But that was about to change and the department was “on the job” and had just added 47 new EMBA members “to their list.”⁶² In fact, there was a race between departments regarding membership in the project, and the management considered this to be of the utmost importance.

There was no entrance fee for membership of the EMBA, but every accepted member had to pay a monthly fee of 25 cents, which, in accordance with the workmen’s compensation act of 1913 (Chapter 2), would be deducted “from the pay envelope, upon a written statement authorizing *him* to do so.” Ordinary dues would be paid even when

⁶¹ *Munsingwear News*, March 1919, p. 7.

⁶² *Munsingwear News*, December 1919, p. 6.

an employee was absent from work due to sickness for a period of less than two weeks, while no such due would be paid if that kind of absence lasted for longer than that.

Membership ceased "upon the resignation, suspension or exclusion of a member, or upon *his* ceasing to be in the employ of the Northwestern Knitting Company" (my italics). Obviously, members of the association were considered to be male, although a majority of them were women.

The board could, "by a vote of two-thirds of the full number" temporarily suspend or expel any member of the association from membership for "such misconduct or disobedience of rules as may, in the judgment of the Board, render such action necessary or proper." Certainly, a member who left the company or was excluded from the EMBA lost her/his paid fees, which might make employees hesitate to leave their employment. That might even have been the intention behind the construction of the constitution.

No benefits were paid for the first week of sickness or injury, but after one week from the date of illness, a member would be entitled \$5.00 per week, paid weekly; upon the death of a member the sum of \$50 would be paid "toward the defraying of the expanses of the funeral." However, a sick or injured member of the association could not be reimbursed for more than six successive weeks and for no more than eight weeks altogether during one calendar year. Employees had better not be too seriously sick or injured!

The EMBA established two ways of minimizing the risks of abuse of the system. First, no reimbursement could be paid until the board had received a doctor's certificate for the sickness or injury that caused absence from work. No benefits would be paid "for disability directly or partly due to intoxication or engagements in unlawful acts." Any sick member had to notify the secretary or the board, if s/he wanted to leave Minneapolis during a benefited period of sickness. S/he also had to send the secretary a weekly report by a "qualified physician," if s/he wanted further benefits due to sickness while out of town, and the secretary should be notified when such a member returned to Minneapolis.⁶³

⁶³Article III of the by-laws of the E.M.B.A. at the Northwestern Knitting Company, Frederick M. Stowell's scrapbook, 1913–1932, p. 54. Vol. 19, Box 32, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Location 148.C.14.3 (B) (ov), MHS.

It happened quite frequently that women went back to recover with their families in Minnesota or elsewhere during a long-term sickness.

Second, the board of the EMBA exercised considerable control in order that the benefits were not abused. The visiting committee had “the duty to visit any member” who was reported to be sick or injured “as often as may be necessary,” at least once a week. Moreover, it had to report to the secretary “in writing the condition of such member.” A benefit could be paid only on the recommendation of the committee.⁶⁴ The *Munsingwear News* reported when an employee was sick, but the magazine also wished her/him a welcome back to work after recovery.

The visiting committee, however, organized sub-committees that carried out the home visits. In 1915, there was one such committee of three female members for each of four districts of the city—the North, the Northeast, the South, and the Southeast—where most employees lived.⁶⁵ No more than three of these twelve women, however, were in the employ of the company five years later.⁶⁶ Being a member of the visiting sub-committees obviously did not imply an extraordinary career at the company, not even a long-term affiliation with it. Whether nine out of twelve trusted women left the company because they did not make a career or they did not make a career since they left the company because of marriage or for some other reason cannot be determined here. The visiting committee also had a “special” sub-commission of three men, but nothing is said about their obligations. Two of them made kind of a career as a foreman and a supervisor in 1920: Ed. Johnson and J. Lynde.⁶⁷ Certainly, they were trusted men in the employ of the company.

The visiting committee seems not to have been able to carry out all the home visits with the help of the area committees, especially not after the outbreak of the “Spanish flu” in 1918. In April 1919, the visiting

⁶⁴Article IV of the by-laws of the E.M.B.A at the Northwestern Knitting Company, Frederick M. Stowell’s scrapbook, 1913–1932, p. 54. Vol. 19, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3 (B) (ov), MHS.

⁶⁵*Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 9.

⁶⁶Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, 1920, Munsingwear Inc., *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

⁶⁷Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, 1920, Munsingwear Inc., *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 115.H.17.1B, MHS.

committee was upgraded into the home visiting department. It was supposed to "connect the factory and the home a little more closely" with a view to "binding together the Munsingwear family," and it was clearly stated that the new department should "serve the employees whenever a need [was] apparent [in] accordance with the spirit of Industrial Service."⁶⁸ The directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company obviously tried to link the lives of the employees to the company in quite a different way than the Ford directors did. The reason was the difference in the gender composition of the workers at the two companies as well as their different marital status. While the Ford program was based on the male breadwinner family economy, the Munsingwear program was based on single women, who either only contributed to the family economy or did not have anyone else but themselves to support. The company was their "Family".

On the initiative of the home visiting department, Mrs. Kathrine A. Ellis was hired as the "home visitor" in the industrial service department. The editor of the *Munsingwear News* assured everyone that she already had made "hosts of friends, both in the plant and in the homes where she calls in cases of sickness or prolonged absence."⁶⁹ Readers of the company house organ also learned that Mrs. Ellis had made "over a thousand calls" during the past months, mostly to check sick employees. The editor expected "that the coming year this department will minister in much a larger way in this factory."⁷⁰ It certainly did. In April 1920, the company magazine reported that Mrs. Ellis had visited 205 employees in their homes that were "scattered over the entire city."⁷¹ Since the city was wide and several employees lived far away from the plant, it must have been a time-consuming activity to care for and/or to control the health status of absent employees. So, "for economic reasons," the directors of the company decided in 1920 "to purchase a Ford Coupe to be used for the home visitor of the social service department."⁷² Thus, the upgrading of home visits from a committee to a department

⁶⁸ *Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 19.

⁶⁹ *Munsingwear News*, June 1919, p. 21.

⁷⁰ *Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 19.

⁷¹ *Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 13.

⁷² February 26, 1920, Supervisory Board Minutes, January 9, 1920–April 29, 1921, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

was not only a question of the Spanish flu but part of a wider and more efficient program for industrial welfare at Munsingwear Inc.

Whether the sick or injured women liked the home visits or not cannot be determined here. Some employees, especially single women who did not live with their family, probably did appreciate the solicitude of a caring woman. In a devout homage to the company in 1920, an anonymous "Munsingite" witnessed that "during an illness, representatives of the firm keep in touch with the ill employee," and the EMBA helped her "to pass through a most trying and long illness."⁷³ Her "Word for the Plant," however, is too ingratiating to be more than an expression of the ideology of "the Munsingwear Family" metaphor.

Other women certainly were embarrassed at having an unknown and superior representative of the employer intrude in their private situation. Several employees probably identified the home visitor as a "lady detective,"⁷⁴ who just wanted to check that an employee was not absent out of "laziness." The main object of the visits was certainly to check that absence from work was legitimate from the employer's point of view and, ultimately, to decrease absence and labor turnover. At the same time, though, directors of a company like Munsingwear Inc. could present themselves as a good and caring employer. Moreover, industrial secretaries made up a new female profession in private capitalism, and they might have a "feminist agenda" of their own. They performed traditional female duties in a new context, and the managers exploited positive views of women's caring for sick "family members."⁷⁵ Whether industrial secretary Emma Baird identified with the company directors more than with sick employees or not cannot be ascertained, but certainly class, gender, and ethnicity mattered behind the matriarchal caring ideology in the "Munsingwear Family."

It is a little unclear who initiated the association, but the *Munsingwear News* assured readers in its first volume that the company "showed its interest in the EMBA, at the outset by giving \$500, and in addition one dollar for every member over 250 who joined before July 1st, 1916."⁷⁶ The publication of every benefit recipient and the sum paid could

⁷³ *Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Greenwald, 1980, p. 52.

⁷⁵ Hartman Strom, 1992, p. 134.

⁷⁶ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 9.

certainly make several employees believe in the system and join the association, and the *Munsingwear News* kept arguing for membership in most volumes until it was closed down after 1921. In a series of articles under the title "Why I Work for the Northwestern Knitting Company," a woman named "Jane," who left due to marriage, tried to convince her successor at work to join the EMBA. Two arguments were highlighted. The first one was about solidarity between employees:

Our forelady is a dear, you'll like her. She made a nice little speech in the course of her talk, she said that the only thing she had ever held against me was the fact that I never had seen the necessity of joining the EMBA. Of course she said this in a laughing manner but it hit me hard just the same. I talked the matter over with mother that night. Mother said the forelady was right, even if I was strong I ought to think a little about using my quarter to help some other girl who was not as fortunate.⁷⁷

Certainly, "Jane" joined the association, and as if by coincidence she came down with pneumonia just a month later. She went to work, but the forelady took her to the company nurse, who told "Jane" what to do and sent her home. "Wasn't I glad that I had joined the EMBA?," she asked her successor and others who read about her case. Certainly, she gave them a "sisterly advice" to join the association immediately: "Say, that money coming in when I wasn't earning anything looked like a gold brick to me," she declared without noticing that some of it had been withdrawn from her wage. That was her second argument for female employees to join the EMBA. I did not find any "brotherly" advice of that kind in the *Munsingwear News*, so the message had both a class and a gender bias. More than everyone else, the propaganda to join the EMBA was primarily directed at female blue-collar workers. The reason was probably that these employees were the ones who were to be tied to the company by paying monthly fees and to stay in the employ of the company instead of causing a labor turnover problem or—even worse for the directors—join the trade union. The fact that the directors in charge of the company were also lined up for membership of the association as late as 1921⁷⁸ can only be understood as showing that the main goal, to

⁷⁷ *Munsingwear News*, September and October 1919, p. 22.

⁷⁸ *Munsingwear News*, April 1921, p. 40.

get every employee to be a member, was not fulfilled although not given up. It was a “Family” matter, and the directors wanted to be examples even if they did not care about any EMBA benefit for themselves.

The EMBA was supposed to reimburse sick or injured employees, who were expected to return to work within no more than six weeks and who were not sick more than eight weeks per year altogether. The primary aim of the association was to make sure that labor was reproduced for returning to work. So, there was no old age pension at all included in the program. Long-term sick and injured employees and the elderly had to take care of themselves or be taken care of by their families or communities. Nor was there any benefit to cover unemployment. Still, a state labor inspector trusted in 1918 that the employer carried “Liability Insurance” for the employees.⁷⁹

The character of the EMBA as a labor-reproductive body is clearly evidenced by the example of “Anna Anderson 2730.” On April 8, 1918, director Chatfield referred to the board a memorandum from industrial secretary Baird regarding Anna, who had lived in the United States “without relatives and with practically no friends.” Anna had become insane during her employment at the company. Since she had not been in the country for three years and thus “had not legally established residence,” she should normally have been deported to her native country, Norway. That was not possible, however, due to the war. Neither could she be admitted to a State insane hospital, since she was not considered to be a US resident. For the moment, Anna Anderson’s board was paid out of the relief fund of the EMBA, and she was being cared for at a rest home.⁸⁰

The company board decided to take care of Anna for the remainder of the month of April,” but directors Pillsbury and Van Derlip were instructed to make an investigation “at once as to the legal status of the case, and as to such action as we should take from good will and other viewpoints.” On April 15, Charles L. Pillsbury reported “the case of Anna Anderson.” After having consulted Van Derlip, who also was an Attorney, “a formal request for examination for insanity and admission to

⁷⁹Inspections, Textiles, 1917–1918, *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industry*, Location 126.J 2.3, MHS.

⁸⁰April 8, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, Northwestern Knitting Company, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

Minnesota State Hospital for the Insane" had been issued by the industrial secretary. Further, Van Derlip's office had reported that "they were of the opinion that it would be legally possible to have Miss Anderson so committed provided she is found by the alienists [*sic*] to be really a subject for such institution." Obviously, foreign and immigration politicians could unburden the company of an employee who was not able to continue to earn her living and make profits for the company any more.

Getting to Work and Back Home

Since Minneapolis was a wide city and the employees "were scattered over the entire city," transportation possibilities for employees were of great importance for getting women and men to search for employment at the company and to remain working for it. In the 1910s, the streetcar transportation system was very well established, but several women at the company probably found the tickets too expensive to go to work by a streetcar. So, a couple of months after the streetcar strike of 1918 was settled, the directors took up a discussion on streetcar cards for the employees "*for the purpose of decreasing our labor turnover*" (my italics). Due to the entry of the United States into the war, immigration from Europe had ceased and competition for female labor had increased because of the draft of men for the war. Director Chatfield introduced to his colleagues a representative of Barron G. Collier, Inc., a company that was said to be "street car advertising specialists." Its representative claimed that companies like the Western Electric Company of Chicago, the Bell Telephone Company of Chicago, and the Pierce-Arrow Company of Buffalo had successfully "conducted similar campaigns" to get employees to stay in their employ. He proposed to the company directors that a series of cards should be "carefully prepared for the purpose," and that these cards should be carried in street cars for one year. The cards should be changed each month, and the cost for the company would amount to \$321.50 per month. The secretary said that the campaign was "intended to appeal directly to our present workers, and to prospective employees, *setting forth the advantage of work with this Company*" (my italics).⁸¹ No decision was taken, but at the next meeting,

⁸¹ July 9, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

Mr. Chatfield presented facts with respect to our problem of labor turn-over, and with respect to the heavy cost thereof. It was decided that the problem is *so very important and of such increasing importance by reason of the greater competition in the employment of female labor* that there would be much to gain and little to lose by conducting a campaign of education such as that proposed and as briefly outlined in the minutes of the meeting of July 9th. (my italics)⁸²

The directors decided to make an annual contract with Barron G. Collier, Inc. for monthly ticket cards for all employees. The cards were furnished to the company in series of 12, but they could be used in only half of the Minneapolis streetcars, admittedly those which led to the plant. The cost for the company was agreed to be \$177.00 per month. The directors, however, changed their minds and they approved the offer by the Collier Company to enter into “a new contract for cards in all cars” at a cost for the company of \$321.50 per month.⁸³ From December 1918, employees of the Northwestern Knitting Company could travel by streetcar all over the city, which probably made them more interested in staying with the company.

The Medical Department

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a few large industrial employers “decided to construct hospitals and first aid departments to prevent claims of compensation from their workers.” Ford was one of them, and in 1914 the Ford managers supplemented the Five Dollar Day by introducing “the Health and Safety Department” to provide the employees with “a variety of medical services.” It issued monthly accident reports and published lists including “a variety of physical conditions and diseases that existed among employees.”⁸⁴ The medical department at the Ford Motor Company was probably also an effect of the new Michigan Workmen’s Compensation Law in 1912.⁸⁵

⁸²July 31, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁸³November 14, 1918, Minutes of Meetings, Supervisory Board, February 15–November 26, 1918, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 29, Location 148.G.13.7 (B), MHS.

⁸⁴Hooker, 1997, p. 117.

⁸⁵Meyer, 1981, p. 99.

In 1915, the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company likewise inaugurated the medical department as an adjunct to the industrial service department. The department was to give first aid and medical relief to all sick and injured employees during work hours and provide them with "a suitable place for rest and recreation." It was headed by a physician, who was "in daily attendance at his office in the factory," which was "fully equipped for making necessary examinations and giving treatment as needed for medical or surgical cases." The industrial secretary and her assistants supported him by being in charge of the recreation, the rest, and the hospital rooms.⁸⁶ Later, another physician and a dentist worked in the department as well.⁸⁷ Dr. Fleming was the "house physician" of "the Munsingwear Family," Dr. Litchfield the eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, while Dr. Miesen served as consulting dentist.⁸⁸ The house physician argued for caution and gave advice in the *Munsingwear News*, when colds or other diseases were around, and the dentist gave advice about dental health.⁸⁹ A trained nurse was "in attendance in the plant all the time" and "specialist doctors made regular, daily visits," Charles L. Pillsbury proudly proclaimed.⁹⁰

There were 12 hospital beds and screens in the rest rooms, "where sick or tired employes [*sic*] [could] lie down for periods of rest and first aid and quiet [could] be had." Consultations and aid was given without any costs to the employees, but only during working hours. In late 1919, the nurse announced in the *Munsingwear News* that altogether 1724 employees had "received attention" at the medical department during the previous 12 months. No fewer than 924 of these "Munsingites" had their eyes examined, which indicates that good eyesight was of the utmost importance for employees as well as for the employer. Dr. Litchfield's daily visits to the company meant that eye inspections had been performed on "nearly all of the employees in

⁸⁶ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports, June 1920, Munsingwear, pp. 8f. (1-9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 15.H.17.1B, MHS.

⁸⁸ *Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 23.

⁸⁹ See for instance the volumes of February 1916, p. 9, and April 1920, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Pillsbury, *Munsingwear—Its Ideals and Development*, p. 3, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 1, Location 148.G.10.9B, MHS.

several departments,” certainly in those departments where perfect sight was necessary for a work capacity that pleased foremen, supervisors, and directors of the company. In fact, the directors hired Dr. Litchfield because they wanted to determine “the relation between defective eyesight and working efficiency, and to locate and correct any working conditions which might have a bad effect on the eyes.” The examinations, free of charge for the employees, were recorded and statistics were analyzed, and the directors were satisfied. They were convinced that “the experiment will show a way to increase personal efficiency and improve the quality of work.” The “girls”—obviously only female workers were examined—who had defects in their eyes received advice from the doctor but they had to take care of their problems by themselves.⁹¹ The directors were concerned with the efficiency of the workers, not so much with their health.

The department was to cooperate with the supervisors of the manufacturing departments and the employees who worked there in order to prevent diseases and to hasten the cure of diseases and injuries. The medical doctor had to inspect the working conditions of the plant,

familiarizing himself with the work of the employes (sic!), their surroundings, noting the heating, lighting, ventilation, and seeing that no unsanitary conditions [were] allowed to develop, and that everything possible [was] done to eliminate danger from injury and disease while at work.

In the *Munsingwear News*, it was officially stated that “[b]y conserving the health of the employes (sic!), adding to their comfort and contentment, their industrial efficiency and earning powers [were] improved.”⁹²

The stories of “Mary Jones” and “Sadie Smith” in the *Munsingwear News* certainly aimed at getting employees to visit the dentist. One morning Mary Jones woke up with toothache and she hesitated about going to work. But she did, because going to a private dentist without a “dental appointment card” from the company nurse would cause her to lose the attendance premium. Sadie Smith cut her finger on a tin can when she was preparing dinner at home. She tried to take care of it herself but after a few days the finger was badly infected, so she went

⁹¹ *Munsingwear News*, November 1917, p. 7.

⁹² *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 10.

to the medical department at the company, where the doctor and the nurse helped her to get rid of the infection. She was happy with that, "because it saved her loss of time at work and considerable money."⁹³ The management of the company was also favored by the arrangements. In return for help by company doctors and nurses, workers in general were not expected to report "such accidents to the workmen's compensation authorities, for this would result in a rise in insurance rates for the employer."⁹⁴

The managers did certainly widen the concept of scientific management by including "Safety First" in the making of the company into an efficient and very profitable business.⁹⁵ The integration of employees of several nationalities, however, was done in ideological ways, and a paternal ideology was an important part of the industrial welfare programs in several companies, including the Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Inc. That ideology was most of all developed in the company magazine.

THE *MUNSINGWEAR NEWS*—THE COMPANY HOUSE ORGAN

The second half of the 1910s was a period when managers began to exploit company magazines for the integration of their employees. The *Ford Times* was one of them, which "attempted to foster an attitude of harmony and cooperation between company and workers throughout the factory."⁹⁶ The *Munsingwear News* was another of these early company magazines, which aimed at reconciling class divisions and ethnic animosity.⁹⁷ It was published monthly between 1916 and 1921 and it was given free to every employee of the company. It is rich in information on working conditions and labor relations but even more so regarding the labor ideology of the company management.

On the cover of the first issue of the first volume of the *Munsingwear News*, in January 1916 (p. 7), there was a photo of the plant, which

⁹³ *Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 11.

⁹⁴ Hardy, 1935, p. 210.

⁹⁵ On the Safety First movement in Minnesota, see Engren, 2007, pp. 240ff.

⁹⁶ Meyer, 1981, p. 99.

⁹⁷ The *Minneapolis Tribune* called it "the house organ of the Northwestern Knitting Company," *Munsingwear News*, February 1916, p. 3.

sought to give the impression that the company was not really an industrial, capitalist workplace but THE HOME OF THE “BIG MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY.” The editor assured every reader that the Northwestern Knitting Company was a “factory where life is worthwhile—where nearly two thousand happy Munsingites make their living. The institution we love and try to serve, and in whose growth we are proud to have a part.”

One reason for publishing the *Munsingwear News* was that the company had grown into such a large plant and that the work had “specialized to such an extent that it [was] impossible for persons in one department to know as much as they should about persons and events in other departments.” That was certainly true (see Chapters 3 and 4), so it is not surprising that one of the more precise aims of the magazine was to inform on issues “pertaining to health and efficiency” as well as of an “educational nature.”⁹⁸ Certainly, one aim of the magazine was to counteract the disadvantages of scientific management in modern capitalism.

So that no misunderstandings would arise, the editor of the *Munsingwear News* had “Our President,” i.e. F. M. Stowell, make a statement in the inaugural volume about his idea with the magazine:

When we all can realize that we are on common ground, that we are all striving for the same thing and that our own individual success is governed largely by the combined success of the whole organization then, and only then, will we attain to the full measure of our possibilities [...] Our daily business routine becomes less irksome when it is tempered by a real human interest in the joys and sorrows of our associates.⁹⁹

By “associates” Stowell certainly meant hired labor, and he expressed the hope that the magazine would serve as a medium for cooperation in the company. He expected the editor to let him talk to them “a little about ‘Cooperation’.” This was obviously a one-way communication. He did not open up for the possibility that blue- and white-collar workers could have anything valuable to tell him and the other directors about labor relations at the company.

⁹⁸ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 8.

An editorial board of six men and three women was elected by someone who remains anonymous, and twenty department reporters were selected by the supervisor of each department to send "items of news" to the editorial board for publication.¹⁰⁰

There were reporters from every company department, but a closer look at those who edited the magazine reveals that a gendered and ethnically biased paternalism was a guiding star for the magazine. From the start, E. L. Hobart from the manufacturing department served as managing editor, Geo. Brooks from the knitting department as local editor, Christopher Ross from the finishing department as exchange editor, Walter McKinnon from the drying department served as departmental editor, Earl Judkins from the shipping department as sporting editor, and E. S. Bromley from the selling office served as publisher. Only two female blue-collar workers, Ruth Baxter from the boxing department and Minnie Berg from the cutting department, served on the editorial board as "society editors," while the industrial secretary Emma Baird served as secretary of the board.¹⁰¹ From these names we can conclude that the *Munsingwear News* was controlled by the management and that mostly Anglo-American men were in charge of it. Both gender and ethnicity mattered in the making of the company ideology; only Minnie Berg, born in the United States in 1892 as a daughter of Swedish immigrants, challenged the male Anglo-American dominance over the information in the magazine. These positions, however, did not make employees stay with the company for any length of time. Four years later, only Judkins (clerk) and McKinnon (foreman) were still in the employ of the company.¹⁰²

Information from the different departments was to be sent for publication to the editorial board by departmental reporters, appointed by the supervisors of 20 departments. The first department reporters were: Alvina Krinkop (spooling), Alma Olson (heavyweight knitting), Myrtle Hilvers (mediumweight knitting), Ruth Kueneke (lightweight knitting), Geo. Baxter (brushing), T. P. Thompson (laundry), Archie Filion (bleaching), Agnes Sisson (drying), Margaret Looney (lightweight

¹⁰⁰ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 3.

¹⁰² Minimum Wage Commission, Wage Investigation, Pay Roll Reports for June 1920, Munsingwear, pp. 8f. (1-9), *Minnesota State Department of Labor and Industries*, Location 15.H.17.1B, MHS.

cutting), Lottie Rogers (heavyweight cutting), Anna Rogers (lightweight finishing), Gertrude Schubert (heavyweight finishing), Marie Fieber (mediumweight finishing), Edwin Johnson (boxing), Marie Burkenstock (pressing), Louis Mester (power), Ralph Raiche (mechanical), Geo. Wilson (stores), A. W. Wieseke (manufacturing office), and Hazel Frizell (selling office).¹⁰³ Thus, twelve women and eight men were engaged as local department reporters, so, once again, men were over-represented, while the ethnic plurality among employees was reflected among the reporters. Obviously, the national diversity of the employees had to be acknowledged among the reporters and in the self-identification of the company, even though Finnish and Polish women were not represented. Women of the main national groups were supposed to feel a personal relationship with the journal and, beyond it, the Company.

The *Munsingwear News* aimed at creating personal bonds between the company and the individuals as well as between the many individual employees. Anything private about the employees could be read in the magazine, including sickness and other reasons for absenteeism, ending of employment, the death of an employee or of a relative of an employee, marriage and birth notices, children and pets of the employees, travels within Minnesota and to other states, and overseas to Europe. It is quite obvious that this variety of personal acknowledgments was intended to make all workers, male and female of different ethnic backgrounds and class locations, identify themselves as members of a “Family,” who were related to each other as well as to the company and who should be concerned about other “Family members.”

The editor published positive responses to the latest edition of the magazine to underline the “Family” character. In March 1918, for example, Selma Isaccson stressed her affinity with the company in a report from a long trip to Sweden that she commenced in August 1916:

I told my mother that I worked in the Munsingwear mill, and told her about all the intelligent young men and girls working there, and that I was proud of being a member of the Munsingwear family. I brought all the Munsingwear News home with me [...] When we heard that the United States had joined in the war I worried because I was afraid I would not get back to the United States.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Munsingwear News*, March 1918, p. 7.

Certainly, Selma Isaccson confirmed her "proletarian diaspora" in the United States to her mother and to every reader of the *Munsingwear News*.¹⁰⁵ Another employee expressed her/his "words of appreciation" to the officers and managers of the company "for the many pleasures and helpful activities we enjoy as employees." S/he further testified how "glad" and "anxious" the employees were to receive a new issue of the *Munsingwear News*, which s/he claimed to be "the best in the land." S/he concluded by taking "this opportunity to thank the officials and to assure them that we appreciate their help and interest and are glad to be members of the Munsingwear family."¹⁰⁶

In one of the few signed articles, the power sewing machine operator Anna Wolley praised the company in all its details: the attendance bonus, an efficiency bonus, the savings program, the services of the medical department and the restroom, the recreational facilities, the EMBA, the cafeteria, "an artesian well, over 800 feet deep [that] supplies us with pure water," the library and the "educational [...] night classes in efficiency and Americanization." Most of all, however, she liked "The Munsingwear News, published by and for the people who make and sell Munsingwear." She assured the readers that all employees took "a keen interest in it and [that] it [was] eagerly looked for each month." Perhaps she had good support for all these statements, but I doubt that this sewing machine operator knew that the *Munsingwear News* had become "one of the greatest house magazines in the U.S. [and that] many large firms and even universities [were] studying its construction."¹⁰⁷ True, she might have known that the company was deeply involved in the Americanization program "within its doors," which aimed at "helping foreigners on the road to good American citizenship," but I doubt she realized that the aim of the program was "that they may not become the victims of anarchy and bolshevism." And, due to the large labor turnover, I doubt that all of her colleagues agreed with her that there was a friendship between employer and employee at the company that "at any rate" was "a relation of perfect equality." Rather, those formulations ultimately reflect the wishes of the management that there should be an idea of a deep class-bridging consensus at the company.

¹⁰⁵The concept of "Women's Proletarian Diaspora" is discussed by Guglielmo, 2010, pp. 56ff.

¹⁰⁶*Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 20.

¹⁰⁷*Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 24.

The affinity with the company was also expressed in letters from drafted male workers of the company, who expressed their gratitude for the issues of the *Munsingwear News* that were sent to them in camps in the United States or in Europe. We will develop that idea further in Chapter 8.

In 1919, the editor initiated a series of articles, where employees could explain why they worked for the company. "One of the family" gave her/his answer:

My hand is up about those articles Miss Feldhammer wants for the Munsingwear News on "Why I Work for the Northwestern Knitting Company." [...] My work and the atmosphere in which I work is a very vital things [*sic*] to me. I could not give the best that is in me or be happy in my work unless I believed in my employer's product, his methods of conducting his business and his treatment of his employees. Consequently, I try to pick my "boss" as carefully as he selects his employees [...] nowhere have I seen evidence of such high business ideals as are shown here. Courtesy, Co-operation, Honesty, Service and all like Christian virtues seem to be embodied in their motto. I am glad to be able to go on record in saying that it is refreshing to find a firm like the Northwestern Knitting Company and that it is a pleasure to serve them.¹⁰⁸

This statement was expressed by an office worker, but s/he did not only praise the employer in general but also gave the members of "the Munsingwear Family" the impression that they were especially chosen by the Pater of the family to work for him. However, it does not match reality very well, since the circumstances at work were frequently expressed by the directors in terms of labor turnover among blue-collar workers as a most severe problem. Instead, it was a significant part of the paternal ideology of the company management.

"A Munsingite" told her colleagues that she had previously been sewing in a small dressmaking shop, but "my spirit began to feel crushed and cramped." She wanted "larger surroundings and broader vision" as well as work that was "less confining and more systematic." She found that work at the "Munsingwear Factories." In fact, she found "all the operations so systematized that the individual operator just looked after her part of the work and so the nerves [had] a chance to relax."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Munsingwear News*, September and October 1919, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ *Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 20.

Even if a far-reaching division of labor was a reason for this woman to work at the large and modern garment company she unintentionally highlighted the scientific management of women's work at the company, which caused an anonymous existence at work that the *Munsingwear News* and other efforts were supposed to disguise. She added that "the courteous and businesslike treatment received at the hands of our foremen and foreladies" was another reason to work there.

Another "Munsingite" explained that the directors had "made the rooms so pleasant looking and sanitary that the hours pass quickly by, and at the end of the day one could figure how she [the worker] would feel if she had worked in some of the so-called sweat-shops." The use of the word "she" indicates, however, that the writer had someone else but him/herself in mind. Moreover, the following passage sounds a little too ingratiating with the directors:

I know that I do not figure very much in the summaries at the end of the business period, but I know that the owners feel that there is some credit due the girls in the factory who are on the production side of the business.¹¹⁰

The work of most women at the company was both gendered and infantilized, while ethnicity was played down in 1920. Certainly, they did not know about the great profits that the directors and stockowners made from their work.

No doubt, the editor of the *Munsingwear News* had pedagogical ambitions for the project. Stories with the following moral aimed at including all employees in "the Munsingwear Family." "Jane" argued for membership of the EMBA, and at the same time she tried to convince her successor to join the savings program:

There was a time when I really never thought much about saving money; but the time came when I wanted to fill my 'Hope Box,' then there was something doing. Pa and ma couldn't help much, so it was up to me to get busy.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ *Munsingwear News*, April 1920, p. 43.

¹¹¹ *Munsingwear News*, September and October 1919, p. 22.

The thing was that her fiancé came back from the war in Europe and he “insisted upon being married as soon as he was settled in a good place. I wasn’t going to Tom empty handed, so it was up to me to make every penny count.” Single women at work at Munsingwear Inc. should work harder to be able to join a man in marriage in a respectful way.

Finally, the power sewing machine operator Esther Kurtz reported from the “first summer school of Industrial Women ever held in the United States” at Bryn Mawr in Philadelphia. She was sent there by several organizations like the North Central Field of YWCA, the League of Women voters, the Women’s Club of Minneapolis, and the Bryn Mawr College Alumnus, and she was accompanied by “former Munsingite” Esther Oberg. She particularly enjoyed the class in industrial organization:

We found in this study that we had really been taking the modern world and its factories as they stands [*sic*] to-day, very much for granted—that we knew little or nothing about the struggles of the people who had come out from the little household and domestic systems to grow into the great machine run factories of to-day. We studied large scale production, forms of business organizations, trust and monopolies, risks taken in the modern industry and waste.¹¹²

Indeed, Esther Kurtz was upset by stories she heard from classmates of other plants in the United States, and she summarized what she heard: “Well I think that I must work in heaven’ for no such conditions exists [*sic*] in our Munsingwear factory.” She assured every colleague in words that must have made the directors proud of her for helping them to get her colleagues to appreciate the conditions at the plant: “I came back to good old Minneapolis and it surely looked good to me, best of all to our Munsingwear family which looked twice as good to me after my experiences down East.”

LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES AS COMPANY PATERNALISM

The leisure-time activities of the employees made up an important part of the welfare program and labor relations at the company. It was expressed in several different activities. Sports were one significant part

¹¹² *Munsingwear News*, December 1921, p. 31.

of it, and Munsingwear teams were involved in several local leagues. All results were published in the *Munsingwear News*. One male team took part in the "American Division" of the Minneapolis Commercial Base Ball League, where the Munsingites had to compete with teams from Minneapolis General Electric Company, Minneapolis Gas Light Company, Northwestern National Bank, The Minnesota Loan and Trust Company, Janney, Semple, Hill and Company, Minneapolis Steel and Machinery Company, and Roberts Hamilton Company.¹¹³ There was an "inter-house bowling league" and a kitten ball team for "girls," but male sports dominated.

Other activities that employees at the company were encouraged to participate in were the Northwestern Knitting Club, the Northwestern Knitting Music Club, and the Munsingwear Orchestra. Employees were also encouraged to visit the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. There was not much talk about these activities, however, so I will focus on a few other integrating activities.

The library corner was one important pillar of "the Munsingwear Family." In 1919, the *Munsingwear News* claimed that "some fairy god-mother" entered the plant nine years ago and had been bringing books to the library since that time. The library corner was part of the central library of Minneapolis, but orders could be submitted at the plant and books were delivered there as they were to other large plants in the city. Obviously, employees of the company took advantage of the possibilities that the social service department offered. In September, the company ranked second after the Donaldson Company regarding the circulation of books. It looks as if mostly women liked reading books, because 21 women, representing at least 7 different nationalities, procured a card, while no man did so. In December, another 30 cards were issued, all of them to women.¹¹⁴ February 1921 was another peak in book loans: 872 books were "taken out," and 62 new cards were issued. Five of them were for men, which caused the Business House Librarian to conclude: "Men as well as women are reading."¹¹⁵ Still, women dominated, so the interest in reading books was a gendered activity. Ethnicity, on

¹¹³F. M. Stowell's scrapbook, p. 58, *Munsingwear Inc. Records*, Box 32, Vol. 19, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

¹¹⁴*Munsingwear News*, January 1920, p. 24.

¹¹⁵*Munsingwear News*, April 1921, p. 41.

the other hand, did not matter very much, since women of English, Scandinavian, German, Finnish, Czech, Hungarian, and Polish origin procured cards in September 1919.¹¹⁶

Most spectacular and most integrating, however, were the annual winter and summer parties. The midwinter parties started in 1913 and the midsummer picnics in 1915. There is no information on the first ones, but the employees were told in the *Munsingwear News* to save the evening of January 21, 1916 for the midwinter party, which was supposed to turn out as “one of the best times you will ever have.” Every member of “the Munsingwear Family” was encouraged to bring her/his family.¹¹⁷ After the party, the company magazine reported on “the largest and best social event thus far held by the Munsingwear family,” attended by over 3500 Munsingites and their friends.¹¹⁸

The party was organized by a general arrangements committee, headed by C. A. Wolford, and seven sub-committees, six of them headed by men. Altogether, 125 employees were involved in the arrangements. The Reception Committee seems to have represented company paternalism, since it included officers of the company and their wives, supervisors and foremen and their wives, and forewomen—but not their husbands. The paternalism was even more evident at “the grand march” that was headed by company president Stowell and “his partner Miss Jessie Roberts,” a 54-year-old, single woman, who had “the distinction of having been in the service of the company longer than any other employee.” In 1918, she worked as a marker and in 1920 as a power cutting machine operator. Thus, both gender and age/seniority mattered for this class-bridging feature of the party.

After the march, two distinct activities followed: dancing and singing/entertainment. The climax of the evening, though, was the Kangaroo Kourt “as a fun-maker and laugh-producer.” Several officers of the company were fined for different offences. The company president Stowell was charged for “violating the smoke ordinance,” the first vice-president Couper for “resisting an officer,” the treasurer C. S. Gold for “smiling,” Chatfield, another vice-president, for “trying to run the place,” “Father” Gold for “vagrancy,” the comptroller Kirschstein “for

¹¹⁶ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ *Munsingwear News*, February 1916, pp. 4f.

not dancing," the foreman and head organizer of the party Wolford for "flirting," Wm. Rogers for "knowing too much," Fred Johnson for "not dancing with his wife," E. L. Hobart and Victor Fletcher for "giving away money that didn't belong to them (pay day)," Iver Oas for "talking too much," McKinnon for "trying to write poetry," and M. B. Kerr, also another vice-president, for "taking up too much space, thought he could beat the game by ducking under the ropes and making a break for liberty." The vice-president was later "discovered hidden in a clothes locker [where he] had comfortably gone to sleep, awaking just too late to secure any of the refreshments." Rank-and-file white- and blue-collar workers could thus make fun of the directors and top officers at the party as well as when recalling the event when they got the new issue of the *Munsingwear News* in their hands.

The second Munsingwear picnic attracted 2500 employees and friends, and "[t]he crowds went out in two special trains and aboard the regular trains on the Great Northern."¹¹⁹ The *Minneapolis Journal* reported:

Miles away from their knitting, and tending to everything else but that, the girls ran races, played ball, swam, listened to the hired soldier band, danced to the music of a hired orchestra, lunched under the trees near the water's edge, and made memorable the second annual picnic of the Northwestern Knitting Company. Of course there were men at the picnic, but they were truly inconsiderable.¹²⁰

The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, on the other hand, stressed that the day "belonged to the Couper family [...]." A daughter of the vice-president E. J. Couper was the winner of the 75-yard foot race, but most of all "it was her father's fifty-second birthday." Both newspapers reported that the vice-president was given a 32-pound birthday cake by the employees.

The paternalistic character of the event is evident. In the introductory note to the program, the vice-president stressed that he was especially interested this year, "as *you* have happened to select my birthday as the

¹¹⁹The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, July 21, 1916. F. M. Stowell's scrapbook, p. 83, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Vol. 19, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

¹²⁰*Minneapolis Journal*, July 22, 1916. F. M. Stowell's scrapbook, p. 83, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Vol. 19, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

day for the picnic, so I want to assure you that I am glad to have an opportunity to celebrate with you" (my italics). Further, Couper stressed that it would do "us all good to have this opportunity to become acquainted with each other." The directors wanted to think of the company as "one big family," and they hoped that it would always be "a happy family." Where should a father celebrate his birthday if not with his family? Certainly, vice-president Couper used the opportunity for the integrative ambitions of the company.

The event was intended to be a day of amusement and laughing at each other. The women's nail driving contest, the potato and egg races, the men's three-legged race, the fat man's race, organized for those "who don't mind being dubbed Fatty," were spectacular events of the day, but "the big event of the day" was the tug-of-war contest, when eight teams of ten girls each, representing the different departments of the company, were to compete for the championship. The most spectacular game, however, took place between the Munsingwear girls' team and the Northwestern Knitting Company officials, alias "the Dark Horses," in a kitten ball match. According to the program, "there never has been, and probably never will be another contest like this." Female employees competed against the directors of the company. On this occasion, Alma Olson (captain) and the other nine girls were to compete with men in charge of the company, like F. E. Struthers, F. M. Stowell, F. Chatfield, E. J. Couper, W. B. Morris, M. B. Kerr, and C. E. Mann. All these respected gentlemen and "Father" Gold, another patriarch of the company, were portrayed in the program, in the form of caricatures that made these powerful men into "Munsingites."

In 1919, the *Munsingwear News* announced "The Biggest Event of the Munsingite Year." The transportation from the plant to Excelsior Park took place in 35 hired cars, and the employees were encouraged to line up early for a safe seat. The notification included a drawing of the general chairman (probably F. M. Stowell), who was driving a pack of eight directors and middle-range officers, who were responsible for the different activities at the picnic.¹²¹ From the program we can say that these men were foreman Fackler, clerk Shimer, traffic manager Bolmgren, supervisor Niles, assistant manager Flagg, foreman Mackenzie, supervisor Ed. Jackson, and statistician Tolg.

¹²¹ *Munsingwear News*, July 1919, p. 9.

The committees included men and women of several different national backgrounds and from all levels in the company hierarchy to make the activities into both a class- and a gender-crossing day.¹²² On the program we find, among other things, the kitten ball match between the Officials and the Munsingwear Kittens. The Officials were represented by directors and top managers, while the Munsingwear Kittens consisted of blue- and white-collar workers, headed by female managers and industrial secretaries as well as a male coach. "THE GIRLS" tried to make the Officials scared by the following poem:

With all the "Wits" upon our side,
We'll face our foes with honest pride,
Bring on your men—your very best,
Your nurses—M.D.'s and the rest
Your forces then will scarcely do
To heal your bruises on that day.
When our folks show your folks real Play.

Several competitions were held, including the provocative and gender-challenging races of earlier years.

The *Munsingwear News* reported that "the transportation facilities worked like a proverbial clock" and that the Twin City Rapid Transit Company "had cars for everybody right on time." The "real spectacle of the picnic" was the kitten ball match between the Officials and the Munsingwear Kittens:

As Mr. Stowell walked confidently into the pitcher's box, and Mr. Pillsbury took his position behind home plate, the "Kittens" lined up for turn at bat with a determined air, as much as to say, "Now, gentlemen, beat us if you can." Evidently, a battle royal was in store.¹²³

Once again, rank-and-file female workers of several national backgrounds would challenge the male Anglo-American power of the company, but just for fun for one day. The Officials beat the Kittens for the prize boxes

¹²²F. W. Stowell's scrapbook, p. 116, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Vol. 19, Location 148.C.14.3 (B), MHS.

¹²³*Munsingwear News*, August 1919, p. 6.

of candy but handed them over to the women, “thereby taking the keen edge off their defeat and maintaining old-time tradition and practice as well.” The reporter was also impressed by women’s ability to drive nails, a contest that made the picnic complete: “Talk about the fair sex not being able to qualify for men’s job! [...] those damsels drove spikes into boards in a way that bodes ill to future husbands if ever the rolling pin is wielded over said hubby’s pate.” Indeed, the gender order of the work at the company was temporarily challenged, although directors Couper and Pillsbury assured that positions that men of drafting ages held in 1917 could not be performed by women. Most of all, though, the report ended with the ideology of consensus:

But before the curtain goes down, we wish to voice our appreciation of the fine spirit manifested and the interest shown by the company toward its “family” in making possible this big annual outing. Officials one and all, readily responded when asked to assist as committee men, and then just as cheerfully o.k.’d the picnic bills of expense, which, by the way are of considerable size.

In fact, if the secret of the success of our annual outing were to be summed up in one word, that word without doubt would be “co-operation,”—mutual helpfulness. And that same spirit, fellow Munsingites, is the keynote to the success of each and every one of us, whether he be the appointed head of the institution or the humblest co-worker among the “family.”¹²⁴

Even more than the picnics themselves, the reports on them in the company “house organ” served as a body that aimed at bridging divisions regarding class, gender, and ethnic boundaries to make the social order in Minneapolis and beyond safe for capitalism. In a way, making fun of the power brokers of the company was a reminder of the feudal annual carnivals in Europe, when “the People” could poke fun at the rulers of the society.¹²⁵ Moreover, social activities and reports in the *Munsingwear News* exploited prejudices on race as well strengthened the “Munsingwear Family.”

¹²⁴ *Munsingwear News*, August 1919, p. 30.

¹²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington, 1984.

MUNSINGWEAR MIXED MINSTRELS—WHITENESS AT WORK IN "THE MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY"

There is no evidence that any African American man or women worked at the company in the 1910s. Still, Mixed Munsing Minstrels with blackface performers were organized by the Northwestern Knitting Music Club. In November 1916, "blackface artists and entertainers" gave a performance to a large number of Munsingites. Director A. B. Dean served as "an excellent interlocutor," and the event was said to be "one of the most successful plays put on recently at the North High School [...]." Foreman Jamme was the end man—the man at the end of the line of performers in a minstrel show—and entered the stage through the audience, explaining that "he had attended a wedding many miles away." The house organ further reported that a "rooster mistook the electricity for sunlight, and set up a song of his own, to the amusement of both audience and performers."¹²⁶ Obviously, directors and employees at the Northwestern Knitting Company made much fun of blackface Munsingites and, beyond them, African American stereotypes.

In March 1919, another "Munsingwear Mixed Minstrel" was announced on a full page of the *Munsingwear News* to appear in the recreation room, once again organized by the Northwestern Knitting Music Club. It was titled "Keep'em Rolling," and "MARCH THE TWELFTH is not enough, THIRTEENTH too it's on[,] you know [...]." Again, manager Dean served as interlocutor. Twenty-four stereotyped and racialized African Americans surrounded the text of the announcement, and the readers could learn that "[...] SAMBO, TOPSY and the rest are 'mongst [*sic*] OTHERS of the best [...]" (Fig. 6.2).¹²⁷

After the show, the *Munsingwear News* reported: "The Harmony Hounds of the Season [was] a Howling Success," which everyone enjoyed. The "faithful members" of the Northwestern Knitting Music Club "proved us that their efforts during the past fall and winter months had not been in vain." Indeed, the minstrel show was "the culmination of the winter's work." The fun makers appeared at the raising of the curtains, and manager Dean, not being black faced, "greatly enhanced the 'elegantly' dressed members of the Darktown Strutters Ball."

¹²⁶Program; *Minneapolis Journal*; *Minneapolis Daily News*. F. M. Stowell's scrapbook, pp. 88–89. *Munsingwear, Inc. Records, 1887–1979*, Box 32, Location 148.C.14.3B, MHS.

¹²⁷*Munsingwear News*, March 1919, p. 3.

THE MUNSINGWEAR NEWS 3

MUNSINGWEAR MIXED MINSTRELS



KEEP 'EM ROLLING that's the stuff, crowds of folks to see our SHOW
MARCH THE TWELFTH is not enough, THIRTEENTH too it's on you know
MUSIC CLUB is at the source, led by MR. SIDNEY MORSE
There's an ORCHESTRA our own, that lends zest with every tone
SAMBO, TOPSY and the rest are 'mongat OTHERS of the best
It's SOME SHOW, now keep the DATE, bring the PRICE and come at EIGHT

N. W. K. MUSIC CLUB
Recreation Room---Two Nights---March 12 and 13
"KEEP 'EM ROLLING"

Fig. 6.2 Munsingwear Mixed Minstrels. *Munsingwear News*, March 1919.
Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

Two stereotypes entertained the audience. General Irritation, played by assistant manager Flagg, "tickled rather than irritated his delighted hearers," but he "would not have been quite complete without his 'fair' companion, Miss Comfort, played by Mathilda Giertz. Her friends could hardly realize that she "really belonged to 'dat high toned white trash'," the reporter claimed. Further, s/he appreciated the appearance of two other African American stereotypes: Topsy and Sambo.

The Topsy character was developed by Harriet Beecher Stowe in the saga of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as "a slovenly dressed, disreputable, uncared-for slave girl." Other pickaninny characters emerged, but all of them were "happy, mirthful, characters who reveled in their misfortune." Moreover, their "awkward speech, ragamuffin appearance, devilish habits, and butchered English were the source of humor in the minstrel and Tom shows" into the early twentieth century.¹²⁸

In the Munsingwear minstrel show, Topsy was played by Miss Guy. She was always expected to be clever, and "truly a clever 'Guy' she was," the company magazine reported, "although her front name happened to be Georgia and the 'Guy' was the girl who brought back happy recollections of other Topsies." Indeed, she was "set off by Sambo and his contagious he-haw." Trucker Morse, one of the leaders of the Northwestern Knitting Music Club, was generally known for having a contagious sense of humor, "but it was unusually so in the role of Sambo."¹²⁹

Sambos showed up in minstrels "in outlandish, outrageous 'leisure' clothes like dancing dandies and zip coons," and they "preferred the fast life of nighttime to the drudgery of day labor." These "dancing dandies" put no more energy into work than necessary "in order to save their strength for an evening of dancing, gambling, and womanizing."¹³⁰ Moreover, Sambo was the lyrical portrayal of a black lover, playing the banjo and singing love songs to his woman.¹³¹ The *Munsingwear News* reported from the minstrel show: "We can scarcely think of a Darktown gathering without the soothing music of the banjo." It was played by the order filler Clare Nelson, who "gave just the right twang."

¹²⁸Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture*, New York, 1994, pp. 13f.

¹²⁹*Munsingwear News*, April 1919, pp. 14f.

¹³⁰Turner, 1994, pp. 18f.

¹³¹Seymour Stark, *Men in Blackface: True Stories of the Minstrel Show*, Philadelphia, 2000, p. 11.

There were two cunning coons in the Munsingwear shows. In 1919, Catherine Meyer and Ellen Reil, according to the reporter, could not be recognized as such, but even if readers failed to do so, they “no doubt recognized that their little stunts in the show were most cleverly rendered.” The reporter, though, assured that “in reality” both of them were “mighty attractive little ‘white’ girls.”¹³²

The word coon is an abbreviation of raccoon and the most derogatory character in the racial description of African Americans, the lazy and stubborn “Nigger,” who “avoided work and all adult responsibilities.”¹³³ The urban coon, occasionally called zip coon, was, according to David Roediger, the “dandified free Black” in the North of the United States.¹³⁴ Coon songs were characterized by “white fantasy” that “established a separate world,” which “reinforced the minstrel stereotype and added new themes of lust, theft and violence” to them. Fictional black men and women told their own stories about “gluttony, laziness and lack of pride in their own race.” In reality, the racialized black voice was “the voice of a white man from Tin Pan Alley.”¹³⁵

So, why did Munsingites organize blackfacing and perform as minstrels for other Munsingites in the late 1910s? Unfortunately, none of the available sources can help to give an answer, so we have to consult existing literature on the topic to get some understanding of the mixed minstrel shows.

Minstrels showed up in the United States in the 1850s. They primarily targeted Native Indians and newly arrived European immigrants, especially the Irish, who were an explicit threat to earlier immigrants on the labor market. Since the Irish were Catholics, Americans considered them to be “papal agents sent to corrupt the American democratic experiment.”¹³⁶ Indeed, the Irish were discriminated against on

¹³² *Munsingwear News*, April 1919, pp. 14f.

¹³³ David Pilgrim, *The Coon Caricature*. <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/coon/>.

¹³⁴ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 2nd edition, New York, 1999, p. 98.

¹³⁵ Stark, 2000, p. 67. Tin Pan Alley consisted of a group of songwriters and publishers who dominated the popular music of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

¹³⁶ Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America*, London, 1974, pp. 175ff.

the labor market for many years, and they were characterized as drinkers and fighters. "Paddy" was portrayed as the stupidest person in the world. Gradually, though, the caricatures of the Irish faded away.¹³⁷ In Minnesota, immigration from Ireland peaked around 1890,¹³⁸ and Irish immigrants were gradually accepted as "Whites." The Catholic Church was a powerful institution in the state during the First World War, and was included in the Americanization of new immigrants.

In the long run, the Irish were superseded by African Americans more than any other group, and blackfacing by white artists became a characteristic of the minstrels. These minstrels created the "ludicrous Northern Negro characters that assured audience members that however confused, bewildered or helpless they felt, someone was worse off than they were." Certainly the white audience could envy "Old Darky" his "carefree life of perpetual childhood—singing, dancing, and frolicking." The Whites could even "momentarily share his simple world, free of worries, insecurities, and responsibilities that they had to face" themselves. But at the same time, they could feel "comfortably superior to him" and assure themselves that "whatever else changed in their lives, he would always be their subordinate."¹³⁹ "Old Darky" was a modern version of "the classical fool" that everyone else could make fun of.¹⁴⁰ Since African Americans had to learn everything of life "the hard way," the minstrels could inform new white immigrants about modern life in the Promised Land—"inventions, natural laws, the proper use of language, urban problems, and interpersonal relations—without threatening or insulting them."¹⁴¹ These immigrants in Minneapolis and beyond could even laugh at the performances and the racialized African American stereotypes, but they should not themselves be like these "outsiders" of American society.

The "Old Darky" minstrel character gradually changed, and "[t]he aimless and harmless man of yesterday became the ominous black slasher, a physical threat to white society." When European immigrants

¹³⁷Toll, 1974, pp. 175ff.

¹³⁸Ann Regan, "The Irish," in *They Chose Minnesota*, p. 132.

¹³⁹Robert C. Toll, "Social Commentary in Late-Nineteenth-Century White Minstrelsy," in Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (eds.), *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, New York, 1995, pp. 104f.

¹⁴⁰Toll, 1974, p. 161; Toll, 1995, p. 87.

¹⁴¹Toll, 1974, pp. 271f.

of earlier decades adopted “American values,” and Native Indians were no threat to the racialized social order in the United States, African Americans made up “the only permanent aliens.” They did not have a “national origin which could bestow identity and dignity” that old and new European immigrants had,¹⁴² which was illustrated very well by the song “Every Nation Has a Flag but the Coon” that was performed at minstrels:

I really felt so much ashamed, I wish I could turn white
 ‘Cause all the white folks march’d with banners gray
 The Scotch Brigade, each man arrayed
 In new plaid dresses marched to “Auld Lang Syne”
 Even Spaniards and Swedes, folks of all kinds and creeds
 Had their banners except de coons [...] ¹⁴³

Since the Swedes were also alluded to in the text, the song might have been performed in Minneapolis.

Nationwide, the minstrel show in general lost its dominant position in the entertainment business in the 1890s.¹⁴⁴ In Minnesota, however, blackfacing and mixed minstrels were put on the agenda not only at the Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Inc. but also in the northern part of the state in the 1910s.¹⁴⁵ One reason for that could, of course, be that African Americans showed up in the state at the beginning of the twentieth century. The YWCA in Minneapolis documented in its survey of 1919 that, according to a police matron, “Coloreds were moving into 7 corners, making more acute problems.” Miss Mead at the Pillsbury Settlement House identified these problems as an expanding “idea of race prejudice.” Her colleague Miss Hendrichs added that the recently increasing number of coloreds resulted in that “idea of race prejudice.”¹⁴⁶ So, racial tensions and conflicts were about to show up in Minneapolis and they were reflected in the Munsingwear Mixed Minstrels.

¹⁴²Stark, 2000, pp. 70f.

¹⁴³Stark, c2000, p. 71.

¹⁴⁴Toll, 1974, p. 274.

¹⁴⁵Engren, 2007, pp. 385ff.

¹⁴⁶Schedules filled by interviewers, District V, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.



Fig. 6.3 McDermott's Foreign Labor Agency. Letterheads 1909–1923. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

In the literature, minstrels and blackfacing have been featured to shape and/or to uphold the difference between “Us” and “Them,” between “Insiders” and “Outsiders,” beyond that of solely “Whites” and “Blacks.” They have been analyzed as a way for established groups of workers to marginalize newcomers who threatened their positions on the labor market. Minstrels have even been considered to be an expression of racism among white workers, an interpretation that has been questioned though.¹⁴⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobsen reminds us that “the age of minstrelsy roughly coincides with the age of problematic whiteness,” when “distinctions and hierarchies” were still presumed “*within* whiteness.”¹⁴⁸ A letterhead of McDermott's Labor Agency in Minneapolis in the 1910s gives convincing evidence of this hierarchy. It offered employers in the Twin Cities “Austrian, Greek, Italian and White Labor.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, Austrian, Greek, and Italian immigrants were not considered to be “Whites” (Fig. 6.3).

¹⁴⁷ See for instance Eric Arnesen's critical discussion on white workers' racism on African Americans in “Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, No. 60, Fall 2001, pp. 3–32.

¹⁴⁸ Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Colour: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge, MA, 1999, pp. 121f, 129.

¹⁴⁹ “Letterheads,” Location CA 1904–CA 1963, Box 1909–1923, MHS.

Certainly, Slavs and East European Jews were not considered to be whites either. Jacobsen identifies “a protest, on behalf of Polish, Italian, Greek, and Slavic ‘ethnics’” against a “ruthless, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘Nordic’ hegemony” in the United States. Roediger adds that we must avoid “easy assumptions that all European immigrants were simply white.”¹⁵⁰ He considers immigrants from southern and eastern Europe to be “inbetween peoples,” who “existed between nonwhiteness and full inclusion as whites.”¹⁵¹ Only the third generation of them “disappeared into the ‘white American’ census category.”¹⁵² In fact, the main social and “racial” problems in Minneapolis were said to be the tensions between two European nationalities. YWCA surveyor Miss Holtz noticed: “The Italians+Scandinavians do not mix very well and there seems to be a feeling of class prejudices.”¹⁵³ Maybe the Swedes in Minneapolis also did not consider the Italians to be “Whites”?

Slowly, though, these differences between European Americans diminished. Jacobsen highlights the importance of imperialism and US expansionism and annexation of Spanish colonies by the late nineteenth century for the making of “whiteness.”¹⁵⁴ He does not, however, notice the importance of the Anglo-Americanization process and the demands for loyalty to the entry of the United States into the war for this change in race relations. Jimmy Engren, on the other hand, claims that minstrel shows and blackfacing started in Two Harbors, when the Socialists lost their political influence at the end of the war. They expressed the racial stigmatization of African Americans in working class communities and made a part of immigrant workers’ participation in a “racial identity formation” in the region. Immigrant workers joined the Anglo-American “project of white nation building” and “the full integration of the region and the workers into American capitalism.”¹⁵⁵ By participating in

¹⁵⁰David A. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White*, New York, 2005, p. 7.

¹⁵¹Roediger, 2005, p. 13.

¹⁵²Roediger, 2005, p. 20.

¹⁵³Schedules filled by interviewers. District II, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹⁵⁴Jacobsen, 1999, pp. 205ff.

¹⁵⁵Engren, 2007, pp. 384ff.

blackface minstrel shows, all European immigrants "stepped in and out of conventional gender and racial roles."¹⁵⁶

It is obvious that employees at the Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Inc. enjoyed blackfacing and minstrel shows in the second half of the 1910s. Some employees stated in the *Munsingwear News* that they attended the Minstrel Show in November 1919 and declared that they had "never enjoyed anything so much."¹⁵⁷ Certainly, this might have been an expression of racism among white workers in Minneapolis, but we can't take that for granted, since "news" in the *Munsingwear News* often expressed a desired ideology for the employees. The context of the minstrels was a little more complex than simply racism among white workers.

First, the foremen, supervisors and directors of the company also had a blackface minstrel show for themselves. The *Munsingwear News* reported on "the Foremen's Feast and Frolic" in December 1920, when "Bill and His Lady Friend, Liza" were played by foreman William Fackler, and Arleigh Prince, a clerk at the company.¹⁵⁸ Certainly, there was a drawing of the two characters in the company magazine, and the reporter explained: "Them there two 'niggers' sat, and while Mr. Bill was rendering a very touchy, sad little bullet, something about 'Moonshine,' Miss Liza actually ate up a regular 'tailor-made.'" Supervisor John Seeliger presumed that "if it wasn't for that cigarette he knew that 'darky' would be after his chicken."¹⁵⁹ So, there was both a racial aspect to the frolic and a sexual aspect in the minstrels and in the reports of them in the *Munsingwear News*.

Second, Munsingites could not only laugh at the racial stereotypes of African Americans but also at managers, supervisors, and foremen, who performed in the minstrels in the same way as they could laugh at the company directors in the summer picnics. So, putting the stereotyped African American as "the Other" worked to make the Munsingwear Family keep together as a white, class-crossing and class-bridging, but gendered imagined community. The opposite of both Sambo and the Coon was the industrious worker, who had accepted, even internalized,

¹⁵⁶ Roediger, 2005, p. 125.

¹⁵⁷ *Munsingwear News*, April 1919, p. 17.

¹⁵⁸ Positions at the company are taken from the pay roll investigation of June 1920.

¹⁵⁹ *Munsingwear News*, January 1921, p. 6.

“capital’s increasing demands for regular, timed and routinized labor and for ‘industrial morality’ off the job.”¹⁶⁰ So, blackfacing and minstrels might very well have contributed to “the full integration” of immigrant workers into American society and into the social order of capitalism in Minneapolis.

Moreover, there was a distinct gender order in the minstrels, especially when the stereotyped African American woman was played by a white man of the company management. In the beginning, the minstrels also targeted the women’s rights movement and made fun of those women who claimed that women should be equal to men in American society.¹⁶¹ In the 1910s, however, the women’s rights movement was recognized in the political economy of Minneapolis and not targeted in the minstrels, but women were not supposed to claim the same rights at work as men had nor were they to challenge the gender order at work at Munsingwear Inc.

Lastly, the representation of African Americans by the Munsingwear minstrels and beyond was that of an “anti-citizen” that definitely should have no civil rights in the country that entered the war to fight for democracy.¹⁶² So, consciously or not, blackfacing and the minstrels could identify both the insiders of the company and its outsiders and by doing so reduce the differences between the many employees at Munsingwear Inc. of different class, gender, cultural, national, and regional backgrounds and turn them into Anglo-Americans and loyal US citizens in Minnesota.

¹⁶⁰ Roediger, 1999, pp. 95f.

¹⁶¹ Toll, 1974, p. 162.

¹⁶² Roediger, 1999, p. 100.



Progressivism and Social Work for Women in Minneapolis

GENDERED PROGRESSIVISM IN THE UNITED STATES

In the late nineteenth century, a Progressive movement was, according to Shelton Stromquist, established “in response to the mounting social crisis [...] that was most clearly revealed in the battles between labor and capital in the campaigns to save the wasted lives produced by the industrial growth.” Basically, most Progressives held the idea that capitalism would produce prosperity and relieve misery, and they “banished the language of class from the vocabulary of reform.” Instead, they reinvented the concept of “the people” in order to “include a broad cross-section of Americans irrespective of class” and to shape social harmony based on the capitalist mode of production. They tried to develop a class-bridging “model of reform pioneered by women on behalf of a gendered, maternalist reform agenda.”¹ Their main aim was to “master the ‘labor problem’” in order to reduce the risk of open labor conflicts.² Reformers demanded “minimum standards of health and safety, housing and employment” so that class antagonism could be bridged and individuals could become “functioning and productive members of society.”³

¹Shelton Stromquist, *Re-inventing “the People”: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism*, Urbana and Chicago, 2006, pp. 3ff. and 34.

²Stromquist, 2006, pp. 16, 22, 25 and 76.

³Stromquist, 2006, pp. 87 and 123.

Progressive ideas had their heyday from 1907 to 1914. Thereafter, two different but partly related processes gradually split the consensus of Progressivism. One of these processes implied that “class warfare seemed again to be polarizing society,” challenging the idea of social harmony between the classes. According to Stromquist, “the economic imperatives of war unleashed the most dramatic wave of strikes in American history.” The other process was the prospect of the entry of the United States into the war in Europe, which was on the political agenda from 1915. Until then, the political unity of a multi-ethnic society was the dominant political idea in the United States, but gradually from 1915 and certainly from April 1917, the mobilization for war and national loyalty to an Anglo-American nation overran everything else in US politics, including labor protests. Progressives had to position themselves on both processes.⁴ In this study, I will highlight four gendered, class-bridging Progressive organizations, which focused on the living conditions of working class women in Minneapolis and were deeply involved in the integration of women workers in the social order of the city: the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), the Women’s Welfare League, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), and the settlement houses.

THE WOMEN’S TRADE UNION LEAGUE

The WTUL was probably the most driving body in supporting gainfully employed women. It was founded in 1903 by a small group of settlement house workers and female labor leaders. Basically, it was guided by “class-bridging ideals,” and its main purposes were to secure better working conditions for women, fight the sweatshop system, initiate vocational training, and to unionize working-class women. WTUL programs included courses on labor topics, instruction in English, social evenings, musical and theatrical presentations, excursions, and conferences.⁵

The WTUL put a lot of energy in particular into supporting garment and immigrant women. McCreesh maintains that “women from middle and upper-class background sought to help wage-earning women, and

⁴Stromquist, 2006, pp. 194ff.

⁵Stromquist, 2006, pp. 124–130; Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 165; and Lara Vapnek, *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence*, Chicago, 2009, p. 133.

garment women in particular, to improve the quality of their lives.”⁶ Jensen and Davidson add that poor immigrant women in highly industrialized areas were “a special concern of female reformers.”⁷

The Swedish-born garment labor activist Ellen Lindstrom elaborated on the goals of the WTUL in its magazine, the *Union Labor Advocate*, to “aid women workers in their efforts to organize and to assist those women already enrolled in trade unions to secure better conditions.” Members of the league “planned to start clubs and lunch rooms for women working in large factories and to arrange and sponsor ‘entertainments’ for these women.”⁸

The WTUL was a class-bridging body, and gradually ethnic and racial tensions reinforced class tensions and produced a “fierce debate” within the League. The trade unionists “gave priority to the organization of Jewish and Italian women,” while native-born leaders of the WTUL argued that “such immigrant women were not organizable.” They supported “a reallocation of resources to other efforts” and wanted to concentrate their work on “American girls.”⁹

After the turbulent years on the US labor market between 1909 and 1914, and the strikes in the garment industry in 1910–1912 in particular, the WTUL “shifted toward more direct support of suffrage and protective legislation within a wider coalition of women’s organizations.”¹⁰ From 1915, it targeted “the problems of women at work by involving state and local government in regulatory activities.”¹¹ Instead of cooperating with the trade unions, the WTUL joined other organizations of social reformers, including the YWCA, which, among other things organized “an industrial division to provide [...] an analysis of industrial problems and training for women to face them.” Kessler-Harris concludes: “These paths reflected a growing consensus that acknowledged women’s place in the workforce, as long as that place remained clearly

⁶ McCreesh, 1985, pp. 52f.

⁷ Jensen and Davidson (eds.), 1984, p. xiii.

⁸ McCreesh, 1985, p. 88f. Ellen Lindstrom was a member of the board of both the United Garment Workers of America and the National Women’s Trade Union League. McCreesh, 1985, pp. 86 and 88.

⁹ Stromquist, 2006, pp. 127f.; Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 166.

¹⁰ Stromquist, 2006, p. 129.

¹¹ Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 166.

defined.”¹² It seems reasonable to believe that they argued for women workers’ equal rights with their male colleagues at work without questioning that women were subordinate to men in the existing social order at work.

The WTUL backed President Wilson after the entry of the United States into the war. Many of its members “viewed government service as an opportunity to [...] lay the ground for a stronger state presence in regulating women’s working conditions.”¹³ When the Federal Labor Department established “The Women in Industry Service” to “streamline the insertion of female labor into war industries, reformers seized their chance.” After the war, in 1919, Congress turned it into the permanent Women’s Bureau, headed by the Swedish-born labor and WTUL activist Mary Anderson.¹⁴

The WTUL established a Minneapolis branch in 1918.¹⁵ At a regional conference of departments of women in industry, organized by the Women’s Committee of the Council of National Defense in 1918, Agnes Peterson reported that some women were going to organize a committee of the WTUL in Minneapolis. The initiative was a “result” of a course of lectures by Alice Henry on the history of the labor movement; Alice Henry was head of the Labor College of Chicago and editor of the WTUL magazine *Life and Labor*, and she published *The Trade Union Woman* (1915) and *Women and the Labor Movement* (1923).¹⁶ Certainly, these lectures were not very radical in character, since they were given “with the endorsement of the State Safety Commission to a group of very representative women, some of them wives of employers opposed to organized labor.”¹⁷

¹²Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 171.

¹³Vapnek, 2009, p. 160.

¹⁴Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 171. See also Anderson, 1973.

¹⁵*Life and Labor*, July 1918, p. 152.

¹⁶Diane Kirkby, “Henry, Alice (1857–1943),” Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/henry-alice-6642/text11443>, accessed December 10, 2012. See also *Munsingwear News*, December 1921, p. 30.

¹⁷*Report, Conference of Departments of Women in Industry of the Middle-West State Divisions*, Chicago, 1919, p. 7. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.6.9B, MHS.

The first report on its existence in Minneapolis appeared in *Life and Labor* in October 1919. Assistant secretary Gertrude E. Murphy announced the existence of the Minneapolis committee of the WTUL, “although still an infant in age and size.” The committee, though, sent delegations and speakers to the hearings at the State Legislature on the “Eight-hour” bill and the “One-Day’s Rest in Seven” bill. Committee members marched in the labor parade for the first time on Labor Day, and their “banners, bearing the five-planked platform of the Trade Union League, were cheering all along the way.”¹⁸ So, it looks as if the Minneapolis branch of the WTUL was directed toward female labor issues.

The committee focused on just a few unions like the Retail Clerks’ Union, the Teachers’ Union, and the Waitresses’ Union, but most of all they gave priority to the newly established Household Helpers’ Union, a union that was already “one of the liveliest in the city.” Obviously, the many female garment workers were not a concern for the WTUL in Minneapolis at the end of the war.

Gertrude Murphy reported two main activities of the Minneapolis committee. First, its members collected money for a scholarship fund to be able to send one of their “union girls” to the National League School for Active Workers. For that purpose, she testified, the committee had divided its members into ten teams for teachers, workers in attendance at departments of the public schools, social workers, suffragists, trade unionists, university students, housewives, federal employees, business women, and librarians. These teams illustrate that the League was an organization for bringing middle-class women and female trade unionists into cooperation, although the committee in Minneapolis in reality did not approach the female industrial workers of the city very much.

Second, the mission of the committee was “a publicity and membership campaign.” Gertrude Murphy explained:

To help us in the work of campaigning for members among conservative groups who have an idea that our platform is radical, we are having prepared a chart of the industrial programs of such powerful and conservative organizations as the Catholic Church, the American Suffrage Association, the Canadian Methodist Church, the Quaker Church and various clubs, to show how their programs coincide with ours.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Life and Labor*, October 1919, p. 271.

¹⁹ *Life and Labor*, October 1919, p. 271.

The anxiety of being accused of radicalism and subversive activities is obvious in the report. Gertrude Murphy and its local branch represented the consensus-minded character of the WTUL. It did not challenge the interests of employers and the social order of capitalism in the city.

THE WOMEN'S WELFARE LEAGUE

The Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis (WWL) was another Progressive body that engaged middle-class women in women's welfare in Minneapolis. It was established in 1912 in order to protect and support women in the industrial center of the Upper Midwest.²⁰ The WWL claimed that Minneapolis ranked third in the United States "in its number of homeless women." In a folder for public use, it underlined that its most central concern was that "young women of the city should have decent recreational facilities." The League announced that it was engaged in making a vacation home for girls and women that it had initiated an industrial census, that it organized a curfew ordinance committee that cooperated with the police to make the city safe for women, that it organized girls' clubs, that it sent 3600 cards to mothers, "calling their attention to the necessity of providing proper chaperonage for their daughters." Moreover, it organized a censorship committee of motion picture films. The annual membership fee was fixed at \$1.00.²¹

The WWL worried especially about the morals of young working women and the risks that they were exposed to, for instance in the dance halls. In 1913, it opposed a proposal by the State Board of Visitors to "change the present state law on admission to dance halls" from 21 to 18 years of age. A committee of three women was set up to look after the matter.

The WWL also approached the issue of regulating the motion picture shows.²² A Motion Picture Committee of 25 members, including three men, was appointed. It suggested the introduction of a board of

²⁰Minutes of Women's Welfare League, January 5, 1912, p. 29, *Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 2, Location BK1.w872, MHS.

²¹Women's Welfare League—Minneapolis, Folder, Minneapolis 1914, *Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 2, Location BK1.w872, MHS.

²²Minutes of the Legislative Committee of January 9, 1913; May 8, 1913; and December 11, 1913, *Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

censorship, a city ordinance or a state law to regulate the showing of movies.²³ Although she did not explore how she got the information, “Mrs. Kinney reported the showing of immoral films of which she had personal knowledge.” A decision was taken to approach the mayor and the Public Morals Commission of the city.²⁴ A male member even claimed that Minneapolis was “slow in its development” of recreational places under municipal control.²⁵

A “Big Sister Committee” was established to support the League. It had a dozen members, of whom Caroline Menke either represented the Northwestern Knitting Company or had a special task to approach women at work at the company.²⁶ Unfortunately, there is no information in the minutes of the committee about her experiences of the large garment plant.

The WWL was certainly worried about the risk of young women entering into prostitution. In May 1912, its chairwomen Mrs. Kinney was asked to find information about the possibilities of obtaining information from the National Vigilance Committee on “special films” about “The White Slavery.”²⁷ Indeed, there was a good reason to raise the issue. Elizabeth Faue highlights how “the Gateway” of Minneapolis was “a red-light district,” how its side streets “held countless small dives, bars, and brothels” on Washington Avenue and in the Seven Corners area. The “Bloody Bucket Saloon” and “Hell’s Kitchen” were close to downtown and the factories, warehouses, and truck garages, “where working men earned their pay.” The area “represented the Sodom and Gomorrah of the rural mother’s nightmare.”²⁸

²³Minutes of the Legislative Committee of November 12, 1912, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS. In the early 1920s, the *Women’s Co-operative Alliance* made several surveys of movies in Minneapolis; see Cynthia A. Hanson, “Catheryne Cooke Gilman and the Minneapolis Betterment Movement,” in *Minnesota History*, Vol. 51: 6 (1989), pp. 202–216.

²⁴Minutes of the Legislative Committee of December 12, 1912, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

²⁵Minutes of the Legislative Committee of January 23, 1913, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

²⁶Minutes of the Legislative Committee of February 11, 1914, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

²⁷Minutes of the Legislative Committee of May 3 and 24, 1912, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

²⁸Faue, 1991, p. 24.

The housing of working women was another issue in which the WWL engaged. In December 1912, it congratulated the YWCA in Minneapolis on “its action to build a home for young women,” and its members offered “the help of the League in any possible way.”²⁹ The WWL invited the executive board of the YWCA “to discuss the question of lodging houses.”³⁰ In 1915, “Mrs. Bates reported on the Boarding Home matters as progressing.”³¹

The WWL staunchly supported every effort to socialize working-class women in Minneapolis. The Linden Club, established in the summer of 1915 as a boarding house and as “a clubhouse for working girls,” was considered to be an outgrowth of a survey by the Housing Committee of the WWL that was made in 1912, showing that about 4000 women in the city were “in need of better living quarters.” Three months after its establishment, The Linden Club organized a reception for the members of the WWL, “who have stood sponsors to the club,” and an open house was arranged by “the girls for their friends.” It was open to factory workers, teachers, stenographers, and students. The superintendent of the club, Mrs. May Rossbeck Perkins, proclaimed that they were inspired by the Eleanor Club in Chicago and that they “tried to make it like a men’s club in spirit.” The *Minneapolis Journal* considered the club to be an “experiment of transferring heretofore purely masculine privileges to the working girls,” although the clubroom was “delightfully feminine [...] and bears telltale touches and busy femininity.” The journal concluded: “The girls have taken steps to start a self-government association among themselves.” The Linden Club was presented as a “Social workers’ Dream.”³² Since Mrs. Thomas Lowry was one of the members of the WWL behind the club, its class-biased gender character cannot be ignored. Being represented on its board by the wife of the “real estate mogul,” street car baron and director of the Northwestern Knitting

²⁹ Minutes of the Legislative Committee of December 20, 1912, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

³⁰ Minutes of the Legislative Committee of February 21, 1913, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

³¹ Minutes of the Legislative Committee of April 23, 1915, *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

³² *The Minneapolis Journal*, October 31, 1915. F. M. Stowell’s scrapbook, *Munsingwear Inc., Records*, Box 32, Vol. 19, Location 148.C.14.3.(B), MHS.

Company for several years (above p. 51), the WWL was certainly no threat to the social order of capitalism in Minneapolis.

Finally, the WWL engaged in labor issues as well. At the December 6 meeting in 1917, Miss Anna Owres of the Field Committee of the YWCA was invited to speak on "Industrial Conditions among Women during War Times," and Miss Caroline Manning spoke on "Industrial Conditions among Women in War Times in Minnesota."³³ Miss Agnes Peterson of the Minnesota Department of Labor was also invited "to present the work of her Committee on the Women's Auxiliary of the National Council of Defense."³⁴ Unfortunately, I found no information about their talks.

Like other bodies of the Progressive movement, the WWL of Minneapolis was a class-bridging body that in reality leaned toward the most outstanding bourgeoisie of the city not only as regards representation in its board. The WWL was economically supported by the Civic and Commerce Association (CCA). At a meeting of the WWL on January 4, 1916, there was a reminder that the CCA recommended "all organizations asking for endorsement for the ensuing year" to submit their application "within 60 days from the close of the fiscal year."³⁵ It is a little doubtful whether the female workers of the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc. were aware of the activities of the WWL. In 1919, a representative of the league claimed that they hardly knew anything at all, although she considered the WWL to be "a potent factor, doing its best for all women and girls needing its service, and who present their problems to it." The readers of the *Munsingwear News* could learn that the WWL ran a convalescent home for women who needed recovery, the Prescott Lodge as a vacation camp in summertime, and the Linden Club—"the sunniest, cheerfulest, cleanest, boarding home for girls, that [could] be found in a day's walk," where women

³³Report of the President for 1917, *Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911-1962*, Box 1, Location BK1.W.872, MHS. Caroline Manning was later recruited to the Woman's Bureau at the United States Department of Labor. See Anderson, 1951, pp. 111, 197 and 216.

³⁴Minutes of the Legislative Committee of November 16, 1917, *Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911-1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

³⁵Minutes of the Legislative Committee of January 4, 1916, *Women's Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911-1962*, Box 1, Location BK1/.W872, MHS.

could eat for a “moderate sum.”³⁶ Several female employees might have been tempted to join the WWL by reading the *Munsingwear News*, but they might also have hesitated to join an organization that was run by women from another class than their own.

THE YOUNG WOMEN’S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

The broadest program for working women in Minneapolis, however, was developed by the Minneapolis branch of the YWCA, which was established in 1891.³⁷ It was housed in the center of the business district of the city. In 1917, Miss Crittenden reported “fifteen trained secretaries, large modern combined administration building and Association residence, equipped with accommodation for 55 permanent boarders, about 50 transient boarders, cafeteria, equipped to feed 1500 daily, (3 meals 365 days), large gymnasium, auditorium, seating 600, [...] Our two Travelers’ Aids assisted 855 individuals at the depot in month of April 1917.”³⁸

The Employment office of the YWCA had one full-time and one half-time social worker, and it was about to develop a commercial bureau in addition to the domestic service bureau. Thus, the main focus was to supply labor for households, and the reporter claimed that “the most helpless girls who enter the city come to this bureau, she is oftentimes helped by placement in the middle class homes of the city, and she is advised as to her limitations and shown the way to supplement her deficiencies.”³⁹

Miss Crittenden also reported that the YWCA was by then in touch with several hundred industrial girls through different “clubs,” especially young women and girls who were boarding or living in apartments away

³⁶ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 14.

³⁷ Lynn Weiner, “‘Our Sister’s Keepers’: The Minneapolis Woman’s Christian Association and Housing for Working Women,” in *Minnesota History*, Vol. 46: 5 (1979), pp. 189–200, 192.

³⁸ Letter from Lilian Trusdell of the Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association to Miss Cunningham of the Woman’s Commission of May 29, 1917, Correspondence and Subject Files, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Women’s Committee*, Box 1, Location 103.K.7.9B MHS.

³⁹ Letter of May 29, 1917, from Frances M. Crittenden to Miss Harriet A. Cunningham, Correspondence and Subject Files, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Women’s Committee*, Box 1, Location 103.K.7.9, MHS.

from their friends and families.⁴⁰ The committee noticed that one company, “employing 2000 women” had “an entire Young Women’s Christian Association membership of 800 and a fee of \$1 per year for attendance at classes, gymnasium and other activities.”⁴¹ That company was the Northwestern Knitting Company. It was known for its engagement in the YWCA even by the federal labor department, and the company was mentioned in its investigation of welfare work for employees in industrial establishments in 1915–1916. That committee underlined that “[t]he company bears the greater part of the expenses, stipulating that the major part of the advantages offered shall be open to all girls, whether members or not.”⁴²

It looks as if the attention paid by the YWCA to women’s work and social conditions in Minneapolis was part of a wider national campaign to approach these issues. Starting in 1917, “The National Board of the Young Women’s Christian Association [...] began acknowledging the need to direct the attention and services to the business woman.”⁴³ In Minneapolis, however, the association had already, 15 years earlier, started a series of visits to factories where women worked. In the spring of 1902, the association noted information on 19 factories in Minneapolis to approach. The Northwestern Knitting Company was one of them, and the visitor reported from her visit to the plant that two-thirds were “at home,”⁴⁴ probably meaning that two-thirds of them lived at home. Another YWCA officer reported: “Mr. Stool [i.e. Stowell] not willing to have work.”⁴⁵ Still, this non-governmental organization for young women’s well-being was let into the plant. In May 1902, Miss Chappell reported:

⁴⁰Summary of the findings of the survey, p. 18, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴¹Lane, “Women and Girls Employed Outside of Home,” p. 85, Survey 1919, Vol. 2, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴² *Welfare Work for Employees in Industrial Establishments in the United States*, 1919, p. 75.

⁴³Fine, 1990, p. 185.

⁴⁴“Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson,” Vol. 1, 1902–1903, p. 2, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴⁵“Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson,” Vol. 1, 1902–1903, p. 2, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

At 12 o'clock, noon I made my first visit to the girls in the lunchroom in the Northwestern Knitting factory. I spoke on Association work, its need in the city. Its purpose being to promote growth among women (sic!). Spoke briefly of the Minneapolis work inviting the girls to the YWCA rooms on First Ave South, also to the North branch. Played several pieces in the Victor talking machine. Miss Jeffery accompanied me but did not speak. 120 girls + boys present.⁴⁶

In November of the same year a YWCA officer reported: "Mr. Staal very unwillingly that work should be done [...] I had to convince Mr. Staal that I would not stay after 12:30 before he would allow me to come at all."⁴⁷

In another report of fall 1902, a visitor reported from a meeting in the lunch room that "the girls would like a club in the factory but Mr. Staal does not approve of having anything of the kind in the factory at the noon hour."⁴⁸ Obviously, company president Stowell was mostly concerned about the risk that his employees would not come back to work on time after lunch, but certainly any intervention by another person in the factory could be seen as a disturbing factor for the making of profits. Already in the late 1880s, Eva McDonald noted: "Many of the shops and factories are guarded for the one purpose of preventing the outflow of information."⁴⁹

Another short note about the Northwestern Knitting Company of October 1902 says that just one meeting had been held at the plant. The YWCA woman was permitted to speak to "the girls" at other mills and invite them to the clubs of the YWCA, for instance the International Stock Food Co., North Star Shoe Factory, and Lundberg Bros. Cigar,⁵⁰

⁴⁶"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, p. 9, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴⁷"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, pp. 113f., *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴⁸"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, p. 36, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁴⁹*St. Paul Globe*, March 25, 1888. Quoted from Hart, 2012.

⁵⁰"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, p. 36, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

while F. M. Stowell did not want the YWCA to interfere with his business and start a club at the company.

In 1903, the YWCA distributed 750 announcements to 11 plants in Minneapolis, but the Northwestern Knitting Company was not one of them. Obviously, they had no hope for the largest workplace in Minneapolis. On the other hand, Esther M. Ericson noted at another meeting with the Associate Charities in 1903: "Mrs. Arnold gave me three names. Girls employed at the Northwestern Knitting Works." Two days later she "called to see about meeting the girls at noon. The superintendent had just returned from the East so [she] could not see him."⁵¹ However, on November 14, Miss Ericson reported:

Miss Wilham accompanied me to this place and spoke about 5 minutes on the YWCA work in the state [...] There are about 100 girls employed tho there were only about 20 present the noon we were there. It may not be so necessary to do any work here as the conditions seem to be very good as it is. Nelly Farrall spoke to me and said to me that she will come and visit.⁵²

Since the main purpose of the visits to industrial plants was to inform young working women about association work and to recruit them to the association, Miss Ericson's conclusion that everything was OK at the company seems to be a little of an excuse for not being successful in her effort to approach the workers at the garment giant in Minneapolis.

Company president Stowell and his colleagues, however, were about to change their minds. It cannot be documented when it happened, but no later than 1919 the directors of the Munsingwear Inc. were in close cooperation with the YWCA in Minneapolis. The large expansion of organized labor in Minneapolis after 1910 probably made Stowell and other company directors change their minds about class-bridging movements like the YWCA.

⁵¹"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, pp. 105–107, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁵²"Statistics, by Esther M. Erickson," Vol. 1, 1902–1903, pp. 113f., *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

In 1919, a “Social Service number” of the *Munsingwear News* aimed at being “a guide to all that stands for wholesome Recreation in the city.” The YWCA was introduced to the whole “Munsingwear Family,” and the anonymous writer started her approach to “the Munsingites” by stressing the importance of a good social life for working women. She claimed that

Minneapolis is anxious to help and boost her girls to better things, and has provided a way. The way is the Young Women’s Christian Association, which is a channel to all things within reach, for the employed or business girl, or the new girl who has come here to earn her living.⁵³

The red-lettered sign outside the building made it easy for everyone to find the place in downtown Minneapolis, and indoors a visitor was met by “friendly, smiling young women behind the desk” who were most willing to guide an applicant to any kind of activity that she was looking for. The labor agent in particular was praised. An applicant just had to give her name and tell the agent what kind of work she wanted, and then “Mrs. Parberry does the rest.”

Mrs. Parberry, though, did not stop at helping a girl to a job but tried as well to get her into a social network that was under the auspices of the YWCA. She asked: “But wouldn’t you like to join one of our industrial girls’ clubs?” Every woman who joined such a club would find “delightful times, parties and attractive studies of all kinds, swimming, gymnastics, dancing lessons—everything that goes to make a girl’s life in a big strange city what it should be.” The annual membership fee was only \$1, which the author considered to be “the best part of all.” Working-class women might have been especially welcome to the “hygiene and beauty” class” of the industrial department, which, according to the gender-biased presenter, “ought to attract every ambitious girl.”

There were many clubs in the industrial department of the YWCA, including a special club at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Miss Helen Thorsgaard, of the Northwestern Knitting Club, was president of the federation of clubs. The YWCA offered a business course to “the ambitious girl” who wanted to get “a higher and better paying position.” But the YWCA offered more than that. It was especially favorable

⁵³ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 11.

to “the out-of-town girl,” who not only looked for “a livelihood, but a wholesome, happy, full existence in the big city.” Obviously, the female members of the “Munsingwear Family” should also join the YWCA to have a complete life. The Minneapolis branch of the YWCA had thus changed from being considered by the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company as a subversive and disturbing element at the beginning of the twentieth century into a body that actively tried to integrate working-class women in the social order of the company and of the city. In fact, by doing so the company directors admitted that “the Munsingwear Family” did not fulfill all the demands of its young, female members, who should instead extend their family bonds by approaching the YWCA.

The YWCA was also engaged as a mediator of bank savings for women at the company. By 1916, “the Munsingites” could learn that “a YWCA Savings Station” had been established at the plant. Every week, a certified and “thoroughly identified” representative of the association was about to “collect what you wish to put in the bank,” female employees were told. This gendered savings plan was open “for all the girls” at the company.⁵⁴

A year later, the magazine highlighted to the employees the existence of two opposing institutions which were “bidding for your dimes—the Movie Theatre and the Savings Bank.” The comparison was illuminating:

What have you to show for one hundred deposits at the movies? Just the flattering memory of a blur and a few old set check stubs. What have you at the bank? Ten good hard dollars, the kind Father used to make—clean cash payable on your demand, and paying a good rate of interest to your personal account.⁵⁵

Compared to the ideology of the WWL, the editor of the *Munsingwear News* had a much more negative opinion about visits of employees to movie theaters, and her incentive for that was not moral but economic. It is not too far-fetched to divine the employer’s concern about demands for wage increase by female workers to be able to attend both institutions. Moreover, the directors and others in the management of the

⁵⁴ *Munsingwear News*, February 1916, p. 13.

⁵⁵ *Munsingwear News*, May 1917, p. 11.

company hardly had their own daughters in mind when requesting the young women at the company to give up the pleasure of seeing a movie now and then or spending a penny or two on other kinds of amusement after a tedious workday.

Most of all though, the YWCA was engaged in the poor housing conditions for young working-class women in Minneapolis who did not live at home with their families. It concerned itself especially with the many women who migrated into the city from rural Minnesota, from other states in the nation, and from Europe. In the report to the Women's Committee of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety in May 1917, Miss Crittenden declared that the association "also investigate[d] rooms listed for rental, and recommend[ed] safe and clean rooming and boarding places." In 1916, the association had found about 1500 boarding and rooming places for young women in Minneapolis.⁵⁶

In 1919, the YWCA conducted a broad survey of living conditions for women in parts of the city. The main aim of the survey was to "ascertain the needs of young women and girls along the lines of religious instruction; physical, academic, and vocational education; boarding and rooming places; and the finding of proper employment." Moreover, it was performed as a preparation for a "building campaign," i.e. to find out where the YWCA should raise one or more new association buildings for boarding. All working-class areas in the city were characterized as very poor, especially those where immigrant workers lived.⁵⁷

The lower part of the *North District* was "quite crowded" and it was dominated by Polish, Jewish, Irish, and Swedish immigrants. "No colored people to speak of" was reported as the answer to the surveyor's question whether there were any "Special problems of the colored population?" Obviously, race mattered in the YWCA's way of putting the question "What's the problem?" Factory workers dominated among the inhabitants. The houses were old and large, and they could easily be turned into rooming and boarding houses. They were "generally

⁵⁶Letter of May 29, 1917, from Frances M. Crittenden to Miss Harriet A. Cunningham, Correspondence and Subject Files, *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Women's Committee*, Box 1, Location 103.K.7.9, MHS.

⁵⁷Report of the survey director, p. 1, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

far from being desirable places for girls to live [in], even with their own families,” the surveyor concluded. There were no special boarding homes for “girls,” but the YWCA’s employment bureau listed 23 private boarding houses. The following problems of the district were reported: “no parks,” “some tenement houses,” “saloons and pool-rooms” on Twentieth Avenue and Washington Avenue. A few school principals said that, of the moral hazards, movies were “the worst ones.”⁵⁸

The *North-East District* was another poor district. The first ward was largely foreign, predominantly Austrian Polish, but with representative settlements of Russians, Italians, Bohemians, French Canadians, Syrians, and Scandinavians. There was also a larger number of Germans than elsewhere. Six “colored” families were reported.⁵⁹

According to the surveyor Miss Holtz, there was room for more (social) work. “Bad moral conditions” were noticed along the lower Central Avenue and Broadway, where, “up to July first, saloons flourished” and where there were cheap, overcrowded rooming houses. Nicolett Island was said to be known as “the worst hotbed of commercial vice in the city.” More than half of the women in the official industrial survey “of last summer,” i.e. the survey of gainfully employed women by the Women’s Committee of 1918, worked in factories and mechanical work. Over half of these women were between 18 and 25 years of age, and most of them earned only \$8–10 a week, which was below the subsistence line.⁶⁰ “More or less decayed, unsanitary, and morally hazardous flat buildings” were found on Nicolett Island, the lower part of Broadway, on East Hennepin Avenue and on the Central Avenue. In the district surveyors found many of the 87% of the working women lived at home. “Besides the new immigrant girl, many of these families also have taken a lodger, either a man or a woman, to eke out the family income.” It happened quite often that a young day-working woman “occupies the room and bed of a man who works at night.”

⁵⁸Schedules filled by interviewers. District I, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁵⁹Schedules filled by interviewers. District II, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁶⁰*Women in Industry in Minnesota in 1918*, p. 7.

Since the 11% of working women who boarded had to take rooms in such homes, a dormitory or boarding house was considered by the YWCA surveyor to be “the first great need.”⁶¹

The need of a settlement house was especially urgent in the River District, which was considered to be “the most needy and difficult district.” It was overcrowded and the homes were unsanitary. Many workers were obliged to resort to cheap and poor eating houses. There was a “rapid movement of population,” and immigrants were coming in “to take the places of those constantly moving out.” There were predominantly Swedish, Slovak, and Jewish immigrants in the district. The surveyor noticed that “Slovaks occupy slums on river flats,” and that the “Negro population” was considerable. Moreover, the *River District* had a “larger percentage of wage-earning women living away from home than in any other district.” The surveyors complained that the district had a “very small percentage of membership in YWCA.”⁶²

The *Riverside District* was another overcrowded district with a lot of lodgers. A police matron reported: “Small shops. Squatter homes, lodging houses. Scandinavian and Bohemian daylaborers.” The surveyor concluded that a new YWCA building was “highly needed” on Cedar Avenue between Seven Corners and Franklin Avenue. She reported that “Coloreds” were moving into Seven Corners, “making more acute problems,” and that there was a need for “an understanding woman” to work especially with the “coloreds.” Maybe, however, she was most upset because the trouble and the problems, more than anything else, was the “perverted sex knowledge” among the young people in the district.⁶³

The *Central District* was the most crowded area in Minneapolis, and most of the working class lived there in the 1910s. Most women’s work out of the home in the city was concentrated in this district, where a full 17,000 women out of a little more than 21,000 gainfully employed

⁶¹Summary of the findings of the survey, pp. 20–28, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁶²Summary of the findings of the survey, pp. 1–8, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁶³Schedules filled by interviewers, District V, Probation officers and Police Matrons, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Vol. 5, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

women had their workplaces.⁶⁴ One-third of these were living “away from home,” and one out of seven worked at the Munsingwear plant.

The housing conditions in the Central District were bad, and there were several “flats with low morals.” Its northern part included “a large number of Russian Jews with a sprinkling of Negroes,” and the Finnish center of Minneapolis was located just south of that area.⁶⁵ Altogether, the Riverside District held a quarter of the population in Minneapolis, and there was a mixture of national groups: German, Norwegian, Swedish, Russian, French Canadian, English, Irish, Danish, Scottish, Finnish, Romanian, Polish, Jewish, and Colored. Scandinavian and Jewish immigrants dominated, but there were a lot of Germans as well. A large number of them were office and factory workers; nearly a quarter of them were reported to be stenographers and bookkeepers, but several women worked as office cleaners.

Most boarding and rooming houses in the city were located in the Central District. The YWCA listed 117 houses with 260 rooms in this district. Ten of them were very unsatisfactory, although “the price of room and board in most of those giving board was 7 to 8 dollars per week.” On average, 10 roomers lived in each house. Young women had access to a parlor “for entertaining” in just 10 out of 46 boarding houses, but in 23 they were “allowed light housekeeping privileges.” There were 13 boarding houses in the district within walking distance of downtown. The young women who lived in them, two-thirds aged from 18 to 25, worked nearby. Altogether, one-third of the gainfully employed women in the Central District lived away from home.⁶⁶

As already indicated, the YWCA cooperated closely with the management of the Munsingwear Corporation in their toiling for better housing for working-class women. In fact, the YWCA committee acknowledged that the welfare department of the company had “recently” done a study

⁶⁴Statistical tables, pp. 149–151, Survey 1919, Vol. 3, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁶⁵Reports by District, The Central District, by Rita D. MacMullan, p. 29, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁶⁶Reports by District, The Central District, by Rita D. MacMullan, pp. 235f. Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

of houses in the vicinity of the company. The committee expressed its gratitude to “Misses Beard and Braden,” who had conducted the survey.⁶⁷ In reality, though, the assistant welfare secretary of the company, Miss Elizabeth Braden, who later became general secretary at the North Branch of the YWCA,⁶⁸ collected and tabulated the statistics on the rooming and boarding houses. She scrutinized 46 houses with 293 rooms. A total of 475 roomers lived in those rooms, among whom there were a few more women than men. In addition, 111 women, i.e. 23% of the total, lived in single rooms, while the great majority, 77%, shared a room. Nearly all of the house owners rented rooms without board. In 41 of the houses a room cost less than \$5 a week. In the few cases where boarding was included, the roomers had to pay between \$5 and \$8. Roomers were permitted to use the parlor in 10 of the houses, do light housekeeping in 23, and laundry in 22 of them. A reporter from the YWCA did not consider the housing in the area as acceptable: She concluded that half of the houses were “undesirable” for young women. Moreover, she noticed a distinct gendered division in the boarding: “The nearer down town, the more men in the houses.” But there were exceptions. Not surprisingly, Miss MacMullan claimed that all 204 houses that were listed with the YWCA employment bureau were satisfactory.⁶⁹

There were, however, other reasons than concern for the well-being of workers for both employers and non-governmental organizations like the YWCA to worry about working women’s housing. The Subcommittee of the Central Council of Social Agencies Committee on Social Work for Adults on “Homes for Working Girls” in Minneapolis reported that “many girls go out evenings constantly,” and some boarding girls “always keep lights on until midnight.” The matron of one home complained that “[a]ll the household incline to follow the example. Consequently, sleeping hours are curtailed for girls, all of whom are

⁶⁷Report of the Survey Director, Margareth H. Abels, p. 8, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁶⁸*Munsingwear News*, September and October 1921, p. 10.

⁶⁹Reports by District, The Central District, by Rita MacMullan. p. 36, Survey 1919, Vol. 1; Statistical Tables, pp. 159f., Survey 1919, Vol. 3, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

obliged to rise early.”⁷⁰ She obviously knew that employers wanted the working women to be on time for work in the mornings.

Indeed, there was no tolerance at all of being late for work at the Munsingwear plant. In August 1919, the anonymous editor of the “Questions and Answers Column” in the *Munsingwear News* instead imprinted the obligation for any rank-and-file employee to see that s/he did not arrive late for work, not even due to a line at the company elevator. The answer to someone who was fined for being just a minute late at her workplace was:

What rule do you think the *girls* who are at their work on time go by? Do you think they leave home with the idea of allowing just enough time to get to the mill? I do not think you will find it so. If they find that leaving the house at 7.30 gets them to the mill too late to catch the early elevator, they start from home at 7.25. To be perfectly frank, I never see the reason for staying in bed when you know you should be up and around, and then when you do get up, rush around like a chicken with its head off, bolt your breakfast and rush out of the house just in time to get in under the wire. I'll tell you what to do. Get up a little earlier, eat your breakfast a little earlier and leave the house just enough sooner to always get that earlier elevator, and you will be surprised at how much better you will feel about everything. Furthermore, it will not be necessary to consider, even a wee little bit, why you are fined three cents a minute for being late; the reason will be obvious.⁷¹

Work discipline should be imprinted into the minds of every woman at work at the company. Once again, women were targeted by the company management and their concept of class was imprinted with its gendered ideology.

Certainly, the matrons in homes for working women knew that employers wanted the employees to be on time for work, and that they wanted them to be refreshed after a good night's sleep in order to be able to produce the maximum amount of effort through the day. Another matron reported that she could “encourage earlier bed hours

⁷⁰Report of the Sub-Committee on Homes for Working Girls, p. 273, Survey 1919, Vol. 4, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷¹*Munsingwear News*, August 1919, p. 14.

by imposing a small fine for lights that are kept up after hours.”⁷² That “encouragement” included both blue- and white-collar workers; in fact, most of the “girls” who lived in Homes for Working Girls were stenographers who accounted for 23% of the total, while factory girls made up 12%.⁷³ In both cases, matrons acted primarily to fulfill the interests of the employers of the female inmates’ work capacity.

In a study of female white-collar workers in Minneapolis in 1923–1924, Manuel C. Elmer noticed an increasing interest among employers in the housing of their employees. Employers had become aware that “the relation between the production of the workers and their health and housing is so close as to need no discussion,” he concluded and claimed that “the same relationship exists between the efficiency of the office worker and her mode of living.” He underlined that employment managers, welfare workers, and industrial nurses at companies in Minneapolis “were convinced that the manner of living played a large part in the possible success of the employee.” They considered the health of employees and social activities for them to be “resultant factors” for performance at work.⁷⁴ Thus, the Munsingwear Company’s cooperation with the YWCA to improve the housing conditions of employees was basically instrumental in efficiency at work and the profit making of the shareholders of the company. That was certainly the main reason why the directors put two of the company’s industrial secretaries to scrutinize the housing and living conditions of the many women who worked for them.

SETTLEMENT HOUSES

Some companies in Minneapolis had clubs for “the girl employees,” connected to their welfare departments. In very few cases, though, were these clubs considered by the YWCA to be successful. The young women were normally not very interested “as most of them seem to have

⁷²Report of the Sub-Committee on Homes for Working Girls, pp. 273ff., Survey 1919, Vol. 4, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷³Report of the Sub-Committee on Homes for Working Girls, pp. 271 and 274, Survey 1919, Vol. 4, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁴Manuel Conrad Elmer, *Women in Clerical and Secretarial Work*, Minneapolis, 1925, p. 41.

sufficient activities outside.”⁷⁵ The YWCA surveyor Miss Lane noticed that there were numerous cafés, boarding houses, and clubs in the Central District, “but very few for the girl who is working in the store, factory, laundry and office.” She added that boarding homes for “girls” with adequate supervision as well as recreation, reading, and sewing rooms, and parlors were “urgently” wanted. More than anything else, such facilities were desired for girls and young women aged between 14 and 25, “especially in the territory where the majority of the girls working in the *N.W. Knitting Mills* live” (my italics). The surveyor added that between four and twenty-five girls roomed in “almost every home in the fourth ward of the Central District. “The vast majority of these girls have no place to entertain their men friends except in their rooms.”⁷⁶ For some women the options were poorer than that. The 1919 YWCA committee on the housing and living conditions of working women claimed that many girls could “go wrong,” especially in the Central District, where saloons and prostitution were a distinctive feature of the area, and where child welfare conditions were the “worst in city.” Two public dance halls in particular, the Arcadia and the Viking, made the “Girls Worker” at the Washington Neighborhood House upset.⁷⁷

Miss Lane noticed that some companies in Minneapolis did not “maintain their own forms of welfare work” but instead contributed “largely to that done by outside agencies.” A few of them had adopted community settlement houses or neighborhood houses, which they financed partly or wholly.⁷⁸ The management of the Northwestern Knitting Company, however, did not only establish its own agency but also contributed financially to outside activities. Moreover, the

⁷⁵Summary of the findings of the Survey, p. 18, Survey 1919, Vol. 1, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁶Lists and Schedules of Public and Social Agencies, pp. 211f., Survey 1919, Vol. 3, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁷Schedules filled by interviewers, District III, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁸Lane, 1919, Survey 1919, Vol. 2, Special Studies, p. 85, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association Archive*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

Munsingwear News encouraged the female “Munsingites” to visit the settlement houses in the vicinity of the plant. The editor of magazine made it a duty for her to inform company employees about “the various agencies in the city that are trying to furnish opportunities for study and recreation and social service,” for instance the Wells Memorial House, The YWCAs, the public library, the city schools, the Dunwoody Institute, and the Linden Club.⁷⁹

The settlement houses were a basic feature of the Progressive movement, and the settlement house idea was to be “a response to industrialism which created a large working class and brought about an influx of immigrants with numerous problems of assimilation [...] Their objective was to live among the working and immigrant classes as ‘neighbors’.”⁸⁰ In fact, settlement workers “struggled to minimize class conflict” in order to reject “revolutionary upheaval as the appropriate route to change.”⁸¹ The basic idea was that “middle-class women” should take up “residence among the poorest segments of the immigrant working class” in order to bridge the class divisions. The settlement houses not only “functioned as hothouses for debate over reform ideas” but also served as a place for recreation after a hard working day. One woman even considered the Hull House in Chicago to be “an oasis in a desert of disease and monotony” for working women after sewing cuffs in a garment factory day in, day out.⁸²

In the 1910s, there were several settlement houses in Minneapolis. In a small contemporary local brochure, it was clearly stated that most settlement houses were located “after careful studies and surveys” had been made in communities, where there was evidence that “a large proportion of the population needs leadership in securing acceptable social and economic standards.” There was, in fact, a definite reason for the existence of every settlement house and for its specific location.⁸³ The entry of

⁷⁹ *Munsingwear News*, January 1916, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Winifred Wandersee Bolin, “Heating up the Melting Pot: Settlement Work and Americanization in Northeast Minneapolis,” in *Minnesota History*, Vol. 45: 2 (1976), pp. 58, 58–69.

⁸¹ McCreesh, 1985, p. 65.

⁸² Stromquist, 2006, pp. 45 and 115.

⁸³ *Pamphlets relating to social settlements in Minnesota*, Location HV4175-HV4630, MHS.

the United States into the war widened the field of work for settlement houses, and their involvement in the Americanization process in particular opened up for more houses.

The activities of the houses were described in a pamphlet in Minneapolis:

A settlement is democratic, scientific and practical. The essential characteristic is that its workers are resident. This outward expression of democracy is scientifically indispensable to the work it aims to do. It must have first-hand information if it is to be practically helpful. A settlement location is chosen for the need in that community and the house, once established, becomes a center of improvement, of helpfulness, lifting and stimulating slothful public opinion, providing standards of amusement, recreation and life, *insisting upon the eradication of abuses, political and industrial.* (my italics)⁸⁴

Indeed, the staff of the settlement houses should intervene and involve themselves in the private lives of working women in order to prevent them from “going wrong.”

In 1919, the editor of the *Munsingwear News* highlighted the activities of the settlement houses in Minneapolis.⁸⁵ *Unity House* opened in a North Minneapolis lumber mill area in 1897, where it cooperated closely with pastors of “the liberal churches.” Originally, mostly German immigrants lived in the area, but gradually “immigrants of many nationalities moved in and Americanization work was an important activity at Unity House.”⁸⁶ Polish, Jewish, Irish, and Swedish immigrants were served in large numbers,⁸⁷ and women at work at the Munsingwear mill were invited to join classes in swimming, dramatics, and “many other activities.” Unity House was said to be “a splendid place for fun,” and girls were encouraged “to try its hospitality.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴Unity House after 17 years of Service (1914), p. 3, *Pamphlets relating to social settlements in Minneapolis*, Location HV4175-HV4630, MHS.

⁸⁵*Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 11.

⁸⁶Unity House, 1897–1947, p. 8, *Pamphlets relating to social settlements in Minneapolis*, Location HV4175-HV4630, MHS.

⁸⁷Schedules filled by interviewers, District I, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁸⁸*Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 15.

Pillsbury House was also established in 1897 in an area that was almost entirely Scandinavian in the early 1900s, but many Jews and Slovaks gradually settled there as well.⁸⁹ Pillsbury House stemmed from the Plymouth Congregational Church that provided the house with a “budgetary allowance.” Its activities were “strictly settlement work,” so religion was not to be taught in the house. In 1915, the activities were organized by nine full-time paid men and women who were supported by fifty volunteers. A surveyor of the Minneapolis CCA claimed that the girls who came to activities in the house “naturally prefer sewing, crocheting, dancing and china painting although there is one girls’ carpenter class with seven members.” So, a few young women challenged the occupational gender bar, but more than anything else there was a generational aspect to the activities. The classes in social dancing were found to

satisfy the natural desire of the younger people for dancing and they do not have the public dance hall associations which are apt to be harmful. Those who attend the Pillsbury House dances develop pride in the standard of orderliness maintained and are the first to resent any rough play.⁹⁰

Other organizations rented rooms in the Pillsbury House for meetings. “They represent a considerable extension of Pillsbury House influence,” a reporter noted in 1915, mentioning a large variety of organizations: the Swedish Unitarians, the Swedish Sunday School, the Norwegian Singers, the Norwegian Temperance Builders, the Norwegian Turners, the Sixth Ward Socialist Club, and the Sixth Ward Equality Club.⁹¹ Obviously, even the local Socialists were welcome alongside different religious and temperance associations, at least until “the Watchdog of Loyalty” came to power in Minnesota.

⁸⁹A History of Pillsbury House, Minneapolis 1934, p. 12. *Pamphlets relating to social settlements in Minnesota*, Location HV4175-HV4630, MHS.

⁹⁰Report on a Community Study of the Sixth Ward made by the Bureau of Municipal Research of the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association, pp. 311–313, Copy in Survey 1919, Vol. 4, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁹¹Report on a Community Study of the Sixth Ward made by the Bureau of Municipal Research of the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association, p. 314, Copy Survey 1919, Vol. 4, *Minneapolis Young Women’s Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

Wells Memorial Settlement House, organized by St. Mark's Church in 1908, had an employment department for women, a dental clinic, social dancing for young girls and boys over 16 years of age, music clubs, sport activities, and a neighborhood club for women. "Young married female strangers in the neighborhood" were especially welcome to the club,⁹² but both men and women were encouraged to join the musical club for 15 cents a month, so the mixing of the sexes was encouraged. Moreover, women of the "Munsingwear Family" could join the businesswomen's club. The Wells Memorial's Gymnasium was open for working women, and they could participate in classes of china painting, dressmaking, dancing, drama, "or anything you wish" for \$2 a year.⁹³

Wells Memorial Settlement House was just a few blocks away from the Munsingwear plant, and its staff of eight people lived in the house "to be of service night and day." Boys and men could practice gymnastics, boxing, or basketball four nights a week at a cost of \$3 per year. Two nights a week "young women" were invited to participate in gymnastics, folk dancing, and basketball for 20 cents a month. Those women who were interested in "the new social dances" could be taught by "competent instructors" one evening a week from 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. for 10 cents an evening. A working mother could leave her child(ren) in the kindergarten or the day nursery while she went to work. Moreover, gainfully employed women could have their lunch at the house. Young women were welcome to use the library and reading room, and groups of "young people" could organize a party or a dance. On Sunday afternoons people could just drop in for a "get acquainted meeting" and make "the city seem more homey." The *Munsingwear News* underlined that Wells Memorial Settlement House was "absolutely non-sectarian, non-partisan."⁹⁴

In January 1915, the *Northeast Neighborhood Settlement House* opened as "a social and civic center" in an area that was about to change from Scandinavian in character to Eastern European. It served mostly Russian, Polish, and Slovak populations who worked in restaurants,

⁹²Undated welcome pamphlet, *Pamphlets relating to social settlements in Minnesota*, Location HV4175-HV4630, MHS.

⁹³*Munsingwear News*, February 1916, p. 12.

⁹⁴*Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 7.

factories, and offices.⁹⁵ Its main aim was to “give social expression to democracy by furnishing a common meeting ground for all classes, for their mutual benefit and education” and to “establish the foundation of honest and progressive citizenship.”⁹⁶ Later, the *Munsingwear News* announced that the Northeast Neighborhood House had just opened a new building “to give everyone a good time in the right way.” The options for young women and girls were about the same as at other settlement houses, but the reporter especially highlighted the social room, which was open every night as a kind of “neighborhood parlor,” where young women could meet “their girl as well as their men friends.” The house was next to a playground, where a skating rink was established in winter, and young women were welcome to the house after the skating to get a hot cup of tea or cocoa and enjoy “a crackling fire.”⁹⁷

Washington Neighborhood House was located rather far from the Northwestern Knitting Company, but it served “all kinds” of nationalities, including 50 colored families, although Scandinavians made up the majority.⁹⁸

The *Margaret Barry Settlement* served mostly Italians and Scandinavians, who worked as track laborers. The YWCA surveyor concluded that there was “room for more work in the district,” but she was afraid that “many of these people will not come unless someone goes after them.”⁹⁹

In 1919, the *Industrial Service Center* opened as a home for “every girl, regardless of creed or nationality or where she hails from or what store, office, factory, she is employed in.” Miss Holiday, the director of the house, invited women who worked for Munsingwear to join one of

⁹⁵Schedules filled by interviewers, District II, Settlements and Chapels, pp. 20–28, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁹⁶*Pamphlets relating to social settlements in Minnesota*, Location HV4175-HV4630, MHS.

⁹⁷*Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 9.

⁹⁸Schedules filled by interviewers, District III, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁹⁹Schedules filled by interviewers, District II, Settlements and Chapels, Survey 1919, Vol. 5, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

the “enticing” and “rapidly growing” clubs that had just started their evening activities. Or they could simply enjoy supper or bring their own supper to eat among friends, which certainly could encourage single working women to “get away from the noise and bustle of the streets and work-a-day world.” And best of all, she stated, no fees at all were required. Moreover, girls did not have to be a member of the YWCA, even though the house operated under its jurisdiction.¹⁰⁰

There were, however, some objections to the boarding houses for women. In a report by the Sub-committee of the Central Council of Social Agencies Committee on Social Work for Adults on “Homes for Working Girls” in Minneapolis in 1919, a social worker testified that in general “most of us being working women, a boarding house life, even the best of its kind, is a poor apology for living, and we all agree if we had the problem of home finding to face we would settle it by combining and taking an apartment.” The committee member Marguerite Wells concluded that “certainly a number of girls do leave such Homes as ours to set up light housekeeping” and that working girls and women in general did not want, “as a class,” to become “objects of charity.” Instead, they wanted “to be able to obtain decent living conditions at a reasonable price.” In fact, she concluded her report by questioning the role of the homes for working girls:

Are the restrictions of these Homes such as to infringe upon personal liberty? If so, do they keep out of the Homes the very girls who most need its protection? On the other hand, is there *enough* oversight of the social life and habits of the boarders? Social workers make a great deal of the need of entertainment and recreation for the working girl; do the Homes provide enough wholesome entertainment to satisfy a girl and prevent her seeking that which is unwholesome? *Is there a large class of girls too poorly paid to afford the charges of these homes?* Is the class of girls and women that does not patronize these homes so well paid that without them she would constitute in no sense a burden or menace to society? Have the Homes a tendency to pauperize the girl? *Have they an economic tendency to keep down wages?* (my italics)¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ Report of the Sub-Committee on Homes for Working Girls, pp. 275f., Survey 1919, Vol. 4, Copies of Survey Reports used in the Study, *Minneapolis Young Women's Christian Association, Records*, Box 10, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minneapolis.

Without being able to answer the questions, we may wonder whether the management of the Munsingwear Inc. supported, cooperated with, and showed public appreciation for the settlement houses and the YWCA because these bodies not only made the women into efficient workers and kept them out of the trade unions but also helped the directors to keep wages down? At least, as WTUL activist Gertrude Barnum claimed after leaving work at the Hull House, the settlement house movement did not try to raise their wages or shorten their hours.¹⁰² Instead, the settlement houses contributed to making young immigrant women into Americans, so let us approach that process.

¹⁰²Quotation from Stromquist, 2006, p. 124.



One People, One Language, One Nation: “The Munsingwear Family” in the Anglo-Americanization Process

ANGLO-AMERICANIZATION IN MINNESOTA AND MINNEAPOLIS

In a historical outline of the company in 1964, the anonymous author proudly stated that “During World War I, Munsingwear established a record for patriotic cooperation possibly not equaled in the industry—except by the same company again during World War II [...]”.¹ The author was certainly correct. The directors did engage the company in the war effort, in the Anglo-Americanization of immigrants, and in combating “disloyalty” to the war effort and to the social order of Minneapolis and beyond. But the company was just one out of many bodies in the city and the state that was engaged in making immigrants into loyal, English-speaking Americans. Moreover, Anglo-Americanization of immigrants in the federation started earlier than the entry of the United States into the war. Three overlapping phases have been identified:

1. It was initiated at the end of the nineteenth century, when settlement-house workers and social reformers put a lot of energy into the process of integrating the new immigrants.
2. It was intensified during the war, especially after the United States’ entry into it.

¹“The Story of Munsingwear since 1886,” Mimeograph, 1964, p. 2. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Location HD9940.M8.M87. MHS.

3. The postwar years, when the United States “saw both prosperity and depression, and an intensified, more militant effort to organize the workforce.”²

In Minnesota, the Americanization of immigrants started as “a humanitarian impulse” that should make life easier for immigrants in the new country, but it also implied that Americans should learn from the experiences of immigrants. During the war, though, the program developed into “a crusade for ‘100 percent Americanism’—and 100 percent conformity,” and it was directed by the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety (MCPS).³ In northern Minnesota, the local press and private business became “the most important vehicle for the process of ensuring the loyalty of the immigrant workers by providing pecuniary, ideological and organizational support to the war effort and the drives for Americanism [...], where both immigrant identities and radicalism were questioned.”⁴ In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc. contributed to that process.

Due to its exceptionally large number of immigrants, Minnesota might have been a forerunner in the Anglo-Americanization of immigrants, but committees were organized nationwide. In a federal memorandum, “Organization of Local Communities for Americanization,” of September 25, 1918, it was enjoined that every state should establish a State Americanization Committee, which should establish local committees to approach the immigrants in their communities. They were to include representatives of “every important racial group in the community,” employers of immigrant employees, organized labor, local superintendents of schools, and librarians etc.⁵

Superintendents of schools should be involved, because the public schools were considered to be “the medium through which educational opportunities [were] offered to the foreign born.” School officials who already had experience in Americanization work should “assist the committee in extending the number of classes open to foreign born, in schools, factories, settlements, and other convenient places.” Libraries

²Hooker, 1997, p. 113.

³Bolin, 1976, p. 58.

⁴Engren, 2007, p. 411.

⁵Correspondence and Subject Files. Folder “Americanization” (2), pp. 2f. Women’s Committee. Box 1. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.7.9B. MHS.

were definitely considered to be important centers, where “friendly contacts” could be established between Americans and immigrants. Americanization committees in particular should approach employers of large numbers of immigrant employees, whether these employers had developed any Americanization work at their workplaces on their own initiative or not.⁶

The MCPS established local Americanization committees in every county. “Minnesota in the war,” an official bulletin of the commission, reported in February 1919, that the Americanization Committee in Minneapolis was composed of 60 men and women, who represented the board of education, the public library, the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Young Women’s Christian Association, the foreign speaking churches and societies, the foreign press, the labor agencies, the Woman’s Club, the settlement houses, the Associated Charities, the University of Minnesota, and employers of foreign labor. The board of education had “a special leader for this work,” and it furnished “paid teachers,” who held classes in places that were “frequented by foreigners at suitable times.”⁷

Certainly, the Americanization Committee had a gendered agenda that was based on traditional family values. On May 21, 1918, the MCPS appointed the already existing Woman’s Committee to serve as its committee as well. The committee itself proclaimed proudly that its establishment made a historical event, because it was the “[f]irst time in history” that “any government tried to use its women-power.”⁸ In the fall of 1918, the committee even included a representative of the Trades and Labor Assembly, Miss Rhodes, and a representative of the colored women of the city, Mrs. Pope.⁹ Mrs. Francis Buell Olson of the Scandinavian American Bank was responsible for the Americanization

⁶Correspondence and Subject Files. Folder “Americanization” (2), pp. 2f. Women’s Committee. Box 1. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.7.9B. MHS.

⁷Minnesota in the War. Vol. II. No. 18, p. 3. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 118.D.10.3B. MHS.

⁸Correspondence and Subject Files. Folder “Information for speakers.” Women’s Committee. Box 4. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.7.12F. MHS.

⁹Correspondence and Subject Files. Folder “Reports and Minutes of Exec. Committees.” Report of Committee on Women in Industry. August–November 1, 1918. Women’s Committee. Box 4. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.7.12F. MHS.

program,¹⁰ which obviously aimed to bridge the deep class divisions that existed especially in Minneapolis and the racial prejudices and tensions that were coming up in the city in the late 1910s.

The Women's Committee reported regularly on its activities in different districts in Minnesota. It had moved into "a permanent office, *furnished by the Civic and Commerce Association*, which [provided] them with stenographic help and with allowance for postage and printing (my italics)."¹¹ So, the committee cooperated not only with social and religious organizations in the city but also with one of the most anti-union bodies in the state.

The Women's Committee published several brochures and leaflets on the Americanization of immigrants. The pamphlet "America: One Nation Made from Many Peoples" stated that the war made inhabitants in Minnesota realize that they were many people who lived close to each other, spoke many languages, and kept "many traditions brought from various countries." But times changed with the entry of the United States into the war, and the commissioners concluded: "Now it is time to become **a nation**."¹² They asked every American to approach immigrants and to include them in an American context:

Put foreign born people on your working committees [...]. In places where there are large groups of foreign born, find out who are the influential members in the group, and get them to form welfare committees [...]. In other words, use their own leadership for welfare work.¹³

¹⁰ *America! One Nation Made from Many Peoples—English Our Common Language*, p. 1. Published by Woman's Committee, Minnesota Division of Council for National Defense and Women's Auxiliary Committee of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Undated. Women's Committee. Main files. Box 3. F. 56:1. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

¹¹ Reports for November and December 1917, p. 3. Correspondence and Subject Files. Americanization (3), p. 5. Women's Committee. Box 1. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.6.9B. MHS.

¹² *America. One Nation Made from Many Peoples—English Our Common Language*, p. 5. Published by Women's Committee, Minnesota Division of Council for National Defense and Women's Auxiliary Committee of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Undated. Women's Committee. Main files. Box 3. F. 56. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

¹³ *The Efforts of the State and of the United States to Correlate and Unify the Work of Women*, pp. 3f. Published by Women's Committee, Minnesota Division of Council for

The Women's Committee approached women of foreign birth in their homes as well: "The war is your opportunity," the commissioners told American women, to approach a foreign woman: "You can get her to come to a Red Cross circle or a Food demonstration, or a baby Welfare clinic." They added: "Every American woman ought to make friends with at least one foreign born woman,"¹⁴ and immigrant mothers were considered to be crucial to the Americanization process. "Mother" was a concept that was "bigger than any nationality," the commissioners proclaimed, so American women should encourage foreign-born mothers to join "The Mother's Club," which was considered to be "a powerful agent" in this context. Immigrant mothers should be included in this club "for their children's sake" and in order to learn "what war for democracy means for their children's future." Moreover, every American woman should Americanize one immigrant woman, get one immigrant to become a citizen, teach one foreign-born mother English, and put one immigrant family on their calling list.¹⁵

In 1918, the committee reported six classes in English for mothers in the Jewish and Bohemian communities of the city,¹⁶ twelve classes in English, and another twelve classes in churches and clubs.¹⁷

National Defense and Women's Auxiliary Committee of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Undated. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Main files. Box 3. F. 56. Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

¹⁴*America: One Nation Made from Many Peoples—English Our Common Language*, p. 5. Minnesota Division of Council for National Defense and Women's Auxiliary Committee of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Undated. Women's Committee. Main files. Box 3. F. 56. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

¹⁵The Efforts of the State and of the United States to Correlate and Unify the Work of Women, pp. 3f. Published by Minnesota Women's Committee. Undated. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Main files. Box 3. F. 56. Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

¹⁶Reports and publications. Minnesota Women's Committee. Reports of Work. January and February, 1918, p. 9. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.L.12.1B. MHS.

¹⁷Reports and publications. Minnesota Women's Committee. Reports of Work. July, August and September 1918, pp. 14 and 18. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.L.12.1B. MHS.

“America First” talks had been given at all settlements.¹⁸ In early 1919, the committee had been working especially with Russians, Poles, Slavs, Italians, Roumanians [*sic*], Jews, Bohemians, Norwegians, Swedes, Austrians, and Germans,¹⁹ so most of the large Non-Anglo-European immigrant groups were approached by the committee in different social settings in the city.

The settlement houses were considered to be the best centers for work with foreign women, especially when assisted by social agencies,²⁰ but other bodies were exploited for the purpose too. In late 1918, the Women’s Committee reported: “Classes in English have been established in foreign churches, settlements, clubs, car barns and factories.”²¹

The Women’s Welfare League (WWL) of Minneapolis participated in the Anglo-Americanization program too. In 1919, their president proudly announced: “Not only food and clothing have been supplied but medical advice attendance secured, fuel provided and I fancy, a good bit of Americanization work has been done.” There had been a great interest during the last year among women of many nationalities in the WWL’s Rest Home for Convalescents, and she hoped that “they are all American citizens or about to become such presently.” In 1920, the secretary reported that “Americanization [was] showing results,” as 60 women claimed to be American against 34 in 1919. She appreciated that the *Munsingwear News* published an article on Prescott Lodge’s vacation camp.²²

¹⁸Reports and publications. Minnesota Women’s Committee. Reports of Work March and April, 1918, p. 11. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.L.12.1B. MHS.

¹⁹Minnesota in the War. Vol. II. No. 18, p. 3. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 118.D.10.3B. MHS.

²⁰Correspondence and Subject Files. Americanization (3), p. 5. Women’s Committee. Box 1. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.K.7.9B. MHS. See also Minnesota in the War. Vol. II. No. 18, p. 3. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 118.D.10.3B. MHS.

²¹Reports and publications. Minnesota Women’s Committee. Reports of work August, September and October, 1918, p. 4. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 118.D.10.3B. MHS.

²²Report of President for 1919 and Report of Secretary for 1920. *Women’s Welfare League of Minneapolis, Records 1911–1962*. Location Bh1.W.872. MHS.

BECOMING ANGLO-AMERICANS AT THE MUNSINGWEAR CORPORATION

Learning to speak and read English was a basic part of Americanization, i.e. the Anglo-Americanization program at many workplaces, and so it was at the Munsingwear Corporation. Due to lack of sources, we can't for sure say how and when the program was initiated and how it developed at the company. In the spring of 1919, however, the *Munsingwear News* published an article on "The Value of Knowing the English Language," written by the Minnesota state commissioner of school buildings. The "Munsingites" could read how important it was for all of them to "learn to use the language of our country and remain loyal Americans at heart." It was of the utmost importance to be able to learn about "democracy" and to "properly understand our government," because reading about these matters in "a loyal newspaper or journal printed in a foreign tongue" would not result in "*whole-hearted* sympathy with American institutions." The commissioner assured the employees of the company that he did not consider other languages than English to be "*anti-American*," but he did consider "their continued use" to be "*un-American*." Learning English implied that immigrants would be "able to express their patriotism in terms of the language in which their rights as citizens [were] enumerated." The commissioner concluded:

Fortunate indeed are those of foreign birth who secure employment with American firms of known integrity and personal interest in their employees. For them many of the handicaps are removed and opportunities for development offered. In these establishments there is all the more reason to urge the use of the English language, as in this way the greater opportunities are better understood, made use of to greater advantage, and lead to individual prosperity and success.²³

Certainly, the company directors appreciated these words, especially since reading English was a precondition for its employees to be able to read their "house organ," which aimed at bridging the class cleavages and, after the entry of the United States into the war, substituting an Anglo-American identity for the ethnic plurality that characterized the company before the war.

²³ *Munsingwear News*, June 1919, p. 3.

Classes in English were organized at the company by the industrial service department that approached all employees who did not read and speak English well enough to understand the information. Immigrant employees were recommended to join “our new classes” in English and “Citizenship Training,” to “become better American citizens.” Teachers were recruited from the “State University.” Supervisors, foremen, and “anyone in the Industrial Service Department” should be able to answer any question.²⁴ Classes were scheduled between 6 and 7 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and supper was served in the cafeteria.²⁵ In November 1919, fifty-eight women and four men had join the classes. Close to half of the women (23) were Swedish, and 13 were of Finnish origin, while German, Norwegian, and Polish women were represented by a few each.²⁶

The company classes in English and Americanization lasted over the winter season and into spring of each year. In June 1920, the Munsingwear Americanization School arranged its banquet and closing exercises. A full dinner was served and the program included a speech on “The School” by Alonzo Grace, and on “The Citizen” by Dr. A. E. Jenks, who was the director of the Americanization Training Course at the University of Minnesota. Then followed “Vocal selections,” including “Ukrainian” and “Indian” songs by Miss Laura Peck, after which the company president Stowell spoke on the topic “The American”, and Miss Genevieve Anderson spoke on “The Class.” After these speeches, the Norwegian, Swedish, Polish, and Finnish national anthems and “America” were sung, but not the German anthem. Then assistant professor of Americanization at the University of Minnesota Oscar Junek spoke and presented awards and certificates. The orchestra finished proceedings. The program included the names of “Honor Students” of the company, who had achieved full citizenship, or submitted the first papers for naturalization, or had a regular attendance for three terms, for two terms, or for one term at the Munsingwear Americanization School.²⁷

²⁴ *Munsingwear News*, September and October, 1919, p. 27.

²⁵ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 3.

²⁶ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, p. 10.

²⁷ Copy of the program in F. M. Stowell’s scrapbook, p. 127. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Box 32. Location 148.C.14.3(B). MHS.

The succeeding classes were closed after “a Successful Year” with a social gathering in the recreation room in April 1921. There were song and dance performances. “One of the most interesting numbers,” the reporter claimed, happened when three students of the class “expressed their appreciation for the opportunity offered them thru the school and told of the benefit they had derived from regular attendance at classes.” Once again, Dr. Jenks gave an inspiring and stirring address in the evening. Folk songs of Norwegian and Ukrainian origin were performed, and so were some readings. The social secretary of the company, Miss Baird, “expressed the appreciation of the corporation for the splendid work carried on under the direction of the Department of Americanization,” while the author of the article approached the teachers for their “splendid devotion to their classes.” The director of Industrial Americanization and supervisor of the Munsingwear classes “reviewed the work of the year and congratulated students and teachers on the excellent progress made by many of the pupils.” She noted that “many industries had closed their Americanization schools” during the past year “on account of the unusual conditions prevailing,” while the school at the Munsingwear Inc. kept going in the Anglo-Americanization of more members of the “Munsingwear Family.”²⁸ Indeed, the company was deeply involved in the Anglo-Americanization of immigrant workers and it cooperated deeply with the University of Minnesota and other authorities in Minneapolis.

LIBERTY LOANS AND WAR SAVINGS STAMPS

The MCPS exercised not only repressive and controlling functions but also put a lot of energy into mobilizing Minnesotans positively in favor of the war. One of its most spectacular efforts was the promotion of Liberty Loans. These loans were organized by the United States Treasury Department, and the selling of bonds was organized on different levels of society down to municipalities and townships. Loans were released on April 24, 1917, October 1, 1917, April 5, 1918, September 28, 1918, and April 21, 1919.²⁹ Buying bonds became an action of great

²⁸ *Munsingwear News*, May 1921, p. 22.

²⁹ Labert St. Clair, *The Story of the Liberty Loans*, Washington, 1919, pp. 27f. Location HJ8117.S3. MHS.

symbolic value, and the second campaign even had “an aura of religious crusade,” especially in the Upper Midwest, where the first campaign had been more or less a failure. In the second campaign, however, the MCPS engaged more than fully, and all inhabitants of the state, especially German immigrants, were told that buying bonds was “the cheapest way and the quickest way in which they [could] bring themselves into the ranks of American citizens.” The willingness to buy such bonds certainly did not decrease in the face of the fact that every purchase was officially registered. Besides, the organizers in Minnesota arranged a competition between counties.³⁰ Companies like the Northwestern Knitting Company/Munsingwear Inc. were also deeply involved in these campaigns and competitions (below).

After the war, it was stated in an appraisal of the loans that the financing of US participation in it would have been impossible without them. However, the loans and stamps had ideological and political purposes as well. Even more important than all the money was the number of Americans who participated in the campaigns, especially since “the bulk of Liberty Bond subscriptions came from the patriotic every-day citizen who purchased bonds of the smaller denominations.” The loans were not just anything:

The floating of Liberty Bonds was no mere commercial transaction to be performed by anyone capable of selling a commodity. It was an adventure into a great unknown field, the very nature of which demanded and called forth to service the most highly developed skill in virtually every branch of our national life.³¹

Every subscriber received a Liberty Loan button to be carried so that everyone else could see who had supported the war efforts.³²

In contrast to the first loan, “workers injected [...] spectacular effect” into the second Liberty Loan. But some hesitated. “In some sections of the country,” said Labert St. Clair, “it was deemed necessary to resort to vigorous methods in order to stamp out unpatriotic and treasonable activities which were hurtful to the loan.” There were “German sympathizers,” who “declined absolutely to subscribe to bonds,” and local

³⁰Chrislock, 1991, pp. 221–226.

³¹St. Clair, 1919, pp. 27f.

³²St. Clair, 1919, p. 42.

committees “resorted to such stringent methods as placing German sympathizers who refused to buy bonds on exhibition in wire corrals in public places until the recalcitrants were prepared to show their loyalty to the country by investing in bonds.” Certainly, St. Clair and his book were both part of the Anglo-Americanization process. He praised in particular the fourth Liberty Loan that turned into the greatest success in spite of “*Pro-Germans and other foes of the government who had been frightened into a dormant state by the assertion of aggressive Americanism on every hand, again raised their snake-like heads above the surface and resumed emitting their poisonous propaganda.*”³³ These campaigns were very aggressive in Minnesota.

There was also a gender dimension to the loan and stamps campaigns. Several of the settlement houses in Minneapolis were deeply involved in the campaigns for Liberty Loans, for instance the Northeast Neighborhood House, Pillsbury Settlement House, Unity House, Washington Neighborhood House, and Wells Memorial House. So were the WWL and the YWCA.³⁴ In other words, the whole progressive movement in Minnesota, especially its involvement in working women’s lives was aimed at supporting the war effort. The “Minnesota in the War” bulletin reported: “The Second Liberty Loan was the first time women have ever been asked to take part in financial matters so that it proved to be an educational campaign as well as for money.” Altogether women were credited with purchasing \$5,000,000.00 of bonds.³⁵ St. Clair concluded: “America’s debt to its women in the war never can be [*sic*] fully determined nor paid. [...] Especially patriotic were the American women in aiding with the various Liberty Loan campaigns.”³⁶

Fifty cartoonists also participated in the campaigns for Liberty Loans and War Savings Stamps.³⁷ Maybe the female front figures on several posters, published in St. Clair’s book, made so many women support the war efforts? A mature woman, probably a mother, lifted her hands

³³St. Clair, 1919, p. 51f.

³⁴The 1919 War Chest Campaign in Minneapolis and Hennepin County, pp. 19f. Minneapolis 1919. *Pamphlets relating to financing of World War I*. Folder 1. Location HC106.2–3. MHS.

³⁵Minnesota in the War. Vol. II. No. 18, p. 6. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 118.D.10.3B. MHS.

³⁶St. Clair, 1919, p. 103.

³⁷St. Clair, 1919, p. 61f.

towards the onlookers and urged “Women! Help America’s Sons Win the War. Buy US Government Bonds. 2nd Liberty Loan of 1917.” On another poster, a young woman wore a low-necked gown and had a victory garland in her left hand. Several ethnic family names were listed below the garland, but the headline announced “Americans All!” The subtitle explained: “Victory Liberty Loan.” Another poster encouraged men and women to buy a Liberty Bond and get a button with a picture of the Statue of Liberty and the text “I own a Liberty Bond,” which was said to be “a badge of honor.” Immigrants were reminded on another poster to “Remember Your First Thrill of American Liberty” and that it was their duty to buy bonds of the second Liberty Loan.

There were also posters that linked up with the historical struggles for freedom of and for justice in France, a European ally of the United States in the war against Germany. A picture of a young woman, dressed in a mail coat and lifting a sword with her right hand, was supplemented by the following text: “Joan of Arc Saved France. Women of America—Save your Country. Buy War Savings Stamps.” Another poster portrayed a young woman who had a low-necked gown wrapped around her and wings of an angel on her back, and she held a sword in her right hand and a spray of a tree (not of olive, though) in her left hand. She had a victory crown in her hair. The supplementing text said “Share in the Victory. Save for your country. Save for yourself. Buy War Saving Stamps.” Another poster was headlined “Fight or Buy Bonds. Third Liberty Loan.” The front figure was a young woman who wore a low-necked, light dress without sleeves and held the Star-Spangled Banner in her right hand above her head. Attacking soldiers made the background. This poster was very much inspired by the painting “*La Liberté guidant le peuple*” by Eugène Delacroix with the Goddess of Freedom of the French Revolution. Certainly, all these posters were gendered in order to mobilize the women in Minnesota and the United States in both the war effort and the Anglo-Americanization of immigrants.

ANGLO-AMERICANIZATION AT WORK

Workplaces made up a crucial part of the Anglo-Americanization process. The Minnesota Women’s Committee considered the factory to be “one of the channels through which much valuable Americanization work [could] be done.” Employers who had already been “successful in their dealings with the foreign born should assist the committee to secure the

interest and cooperation of other employers,” and they should “bring to the attention of such employers the relation of a unified force of native and foreign born workmen to industrial and national prosperity.”³⁸ It was underlined in the memorandum for the organization of local committees that the Anglo-Americanization program at work was a concern both for employers and for native as well as foreign-born laborers, because it could raise wages and the general standard of living.³⁹

Moreover, members of the Women’s Committee were supposed to learn about the working conditions of immigrant and female factory workers in the state. The committee recommended every woman who was engaged in women’s social conditions in Minnesota to read and learn about these matters. It proposed the following newly published books: Isaac Hourwich, *Immigration and Labor* (1912), Olive Shreiner, *Woman and Labor* (1911), B. L. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry* (1915), Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry* (1910), and Alice Henry, *Trade Union Woman* (1915). Alice Henry was formerly the editor of the Women’s Trade Union League magazine *Life and Labor* and at the time she served as “official lecturer” for the League. In spring 1918, she was invited by the Women’s Committee to talk in Minneapolis on subjects like “The Entry of Women into Modern Industry,” “The Rise of the Early Labor Organizations,” “Women in the Labor Movement—the National Women’s Trade Union League.”⁴⁰

Provided with knowledge on women’s conditions at work, members of the committee and other women were encouraged to approach employers as well as foreign women:

Show them that they will have higher wages, fewer accidents, fewer misunderstandings if they can speak English [...]. Suggest to employers that fairer terms and agreements can be made with their men if their employees understand what is said to them and that the frequency of strikes will be

³⁸Correspondence and Subject Files. Folder “Americanization” (2), pp. 2f. Women’s Committee. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Box 1. Location 103.K.7.9B. MHS.

³⁹Correspondence and Subject Files. Folder “Americanization” (2), pp. 2f. Women’s Committee. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Box 1. Location 103.K.7.9B. MHS.

⁴⁰Reports of Work During March and April, 1918. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Main files. Box 3. F 56. Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

lessened if men speak English and therefore are not the victims of exploitation by those who play on their ignorance.⁴¹

Strangely enough, the Women's Committee highlighted how important it was for male workers to learn English to be better off at work. Nevertheless, some progress was made regarding women's work in factories. Agnes Peterson—the commissioner of the Bureau of Women and Children at the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries—acknowledged that the committee had “made efforts to keep the subject of the Minnesota Minimum Wage Law before the public by holding meetings at which this subject was fully discussed.” She was most satisfied that the Governor had appointed the Minimum Wage Commission.⁴² Miss Peterson argued that employers of immigrant workers would profit from efficient labor legislation, because “women will be better, work will be better, the future will be better, if the laws are obeyed. This is not sentiment. It is business sense,” she claimed on the basis of her Progressive agenda.⁴³ So, the Anglo-Americanization of (female) immigrant workers and the Safety First movement were intertwined in the political economy of Minnesota at war.

Although employers in general did not concern themselves with the matter until the “labor shortage” in 1914 resulted in much lower production levels than could be sold,⁴⁴ their concern with the Anglo-Americanization of immigrant employees increased after the entry of the United States into the war, when employers complained about increasing difficulties of getting labor at preferred wages due to the drafts for the army and the interruption in immigration from Europe. The directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc. put a lot of energy into developing other components beyond the welfare program

⁴¹ *America: One Nation Made from Many Peoples—English Our Common Language*, p. 5. Published by Women's Committee, Minnesota Division of Council for National Defense and Women's Auxiliary Committee of Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. Undated. Women's Committee. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Main files. Box 3. F. 56. Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

⁴² Reports and publications. Reports of Work May, June and July 1918, p. 1. Women's Committee. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.L.12.1B. MHS.

⁴³ The pamphlet in *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Main files. Box 3. F. 56. Location 103.L.7.6F. MHS.

⁴⁴ Hooker, 1997, p. 113.

for male and female workers on and off work to make them affiliated with the company and turn them into true and loyal Anglo-Americans during the war.

THE NORTHWESTERN KNITTING COMPANY/THE MUNSINGWEAR INC. IN THE WAR

As we noted in the introduction to this book, the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company officially supported the entry of the United States into the war right from the beginning. The *Munsingwear News* published President Wilson's declaration of war on Germany in its May 1917 volume, and company president Stowell expressed his support of the declaration of war. He also trusted in the loyalty to the country of every employee of the company wherever they were born, and he declared that the loyalty of the employees to the United States was simply a logical consequence of their loyalty to the company. The "true Munsingites" were also "true Americans."

Stowell also told employees that the Northwestern Knitting Company could assist the government directly by making Munsing Wear for the soldiers. The company was even considered to be part of the war effort through the name "Camp Munsingwear." Indeed, the director exploited the national loyalty of the employees to get them to work harder for the company and not only support the US war effort but also increase the profits for the stockholders. For the Northwestern Knitting Company the entry of the United States into the war meant even more than "business as usual." But the company management had to work hard to get all of its employees in favor of the war effort.

The directors of the company advocated Liberty Loans strongly and encouraged the employees to buy Liberty Bonds and savings stamps. Two weeks after the release of the second loan, every employee got a letter in their hands, signed by "The Northwestern Knitting Co." and saying: "Attention, Employees! Again Your Country Calls. We All Must Buy Liberty Bonds." There should be "No class distinction, No autocracy, No privileged bond holding class," because both rich and poor, strong and weak "Americans" should contribute to the building of "a barricade of Liberty Bonds to protect our country and our womanhood" from the kind of fate that had hit the Belgians. The directors promised to help the employees buy bonds: "The Company, with no charge, and with no profit or return to itself, will secure one or more Liberty Bonds

for you, and let you pay in small installments.” Employees were recommended to buy at least one bond of \$50 and pay \$2 each payday. The managers promised them:

*When payments are completed, the bond will be turned over to you, together with all interest accrued on your payments. Thereafter, the bond will earn 4% interest on its face, or \$2,00 per year on each \$50,00 bond. (my italics)*⁴⁵

If an employee could not pay the \$2 due to sickness or any other “unavoidable absence from work,” the time of payment could be extended and if an employee should end her/his employment, the company should refund the money paid and make the bonds available to other employees. But the company kept the interest that the federal government paid for the loans until the employees had paid the full amount of \$50, so the company did make some profits out of the loans after all.

The company management certainly made several efforts to stimulate the interest of the employees to buy bonds. On October 19, 1917, a Liberty Bond Day was organized at the company. The *Munsingwear News* reported:

The matter was presented to our people by Mr. E. J. Couper and assistants in our Recreation Room. The management had planned to have the 2,636 employes [*sic*] come to the Recreation Room in five groups of about 500 each, and the plan was carried out with the usual Munsingwear preciseness.⁴⁶

The Dunwoody Band played to mix the political message with entertainment. The editor reported a “very generous response” by the employees, and their purchase of bonds was characterized as “extremely gratifying.”

A week after the release of the third Liberty Loan, company president Stowell advised the board of supervisors that the company was about to purchase for its employees Liberty Loan Bonds to the value of \$100,000. The terms should be the same as they were for the two previous loans.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Munsingwear News*, November 1917, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Munsingwear News*, November 1917, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 13, 1918. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Box 29. Location 148.G.13.7B. MHS.

Five days later, five afternoon meetings were held at the company and another one, for the night workers, in the evening. Two Minneapolis attorneys were the speakers at the afternoon meetings, and Mr. Schweska of “the Four-Minute Liberty Loan Campaign” spoke to the night workers. Company treasurer Charles L. Pillsbury presided at these meetings and “offered brief statements on behalf of the Company.” The organizers certainly suspected that several employees would not be interested in coming to listen to these men only, so some entertainment was arranged. At the afternoon meetings “the Dunwoody band played marshall [*sic*] music,” and “the employees’ orchestra furnished music for the evening meeting.” The secretary concluded that “[a]ll agreed that these meetings were quite successful.” The next day, all division heads reported that “the sale to employees other than officers would run over \$60,000.00,” so consequently “[a]ll expressed themselves well pleased and quite enthusiastic over the outcome.” Considering the power structure at the company, the successful campaign might at least partly be explained by the fact that “[e]ach division head had been instructed to take direct charge of the campaign as to the employees of his respective division.”⁴⁸ Both class and gender mattered in particular in the mobilization of the many poorly paid female blue- and white-collar workers at the company.

Indeed, “Munsingites” contributed considerably to the success of the Liberty Loans, a fact that the company management exploited in its PR for the company. In the article “The Spirit of Victory,” the editor of the *Munsingwear News* published a diagram of the great expansion in numbers of employees of the company as well as columns and figures on “The Way Munsingites Bought Liberty Bonds” (Fig. 8.1).

The amount of money that was put into Liberty Loans increased from \$57,250 in the first loan to \$91,100 in the second loan, to \$112,750 in the third loan, and to \$125,000 in the fourth loan; “Munsingites” bought bonds to a value of \$100,000 of the fifth loan—the Victory Liberty Loan—in less than three months. The editor of the *Munsingwear News* concluded:

Munsingites not only dedicated the work of their hands and minds to help the winning of the war—they also put their hearts into it. During

⁴⁸Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 19, 1918. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Box 29. Location 148.G.13.7B. MHS.

[illegible]

Fig. 8.1 The spirit of victory. *Munsingwear News*, July 1919. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

the five war loans they purchased (the employees alone) \$485,000 worth of Liberty Bonds. During 1918 they bought War Savings Stamps to the amount of \$50,000. [...] They also contributed generously to YMCA and Red Cross campaigns.⁴⁹

Further, the editor called attention to the service of the company and its employees as an ideal:

In the wartime efforts of thousands of Munsingites, service to the nation was the driving force. Service to the wearer had long been an ideal of the makers of Munsingwear, expressed though millions of union suits made yearly for men, women and children in every part of America.

⁴⁹ *Munsingwear News*, July 1919, p. 26.

It was with special pride that they responded wholeheartedly to the bigger, broader appeal of national service and provided almost two million warm woolen undershirts for our boys in khaki.⁵⁰

Another writer concluded that the Munsingites “in every patriotic endeavor” had always “done more than was expected of them.” The employees were said to feel “the tremendous appeal” of the word “Victory,” i.e. they supported the fifth Liberty Loan. That appeal was highlighted at two Victory Loan meetings at the company, when “Munsingites sung with greater enthusiasm and in greater volume” than ever, and when they were led during the meetings by Miss Lucille Halliday of the War Camp Community Service. The audience could also enjoy “a patriotic tableau” that symbolized peace, Victory, and democracy, represented by three female employees who were supplemented by two men from the army and one from the navy.⁵¹

The sincerity in the minds of the company management regarding patriotism can, however, be questioned somewhat. I found no evidence at all that the company itself contributed to the financing of the war effort in spite of the extremely high profits that the directors and other stockholders got out of the production of underwear for the soldiers on the state contract. Certainly, the *Munsingwear News* did not indicate anything of that. Nor did the editor say anything about the very low wages paid to the workers that made the profits come true. The class-crossing concept of “the Munsingwear Family” was strengthened by the entry of the United States into the war, since “the Family” got tasks of greater dignity to perform than just being loyal to the company.

The company directors, however, were not totally supportive of the war effort. They were, for instance, not at all willing to let their male employees of drafting ages to be drafted into the army or navy. On June 11, 1917, the vice-president of the company E. J. Couper approached the MCPS regarding the draft of young men from the company. He started his letter to “Hon. John F. McGee,” the dominant leader of the commission, by claiming that England made “a serious mistake” in the beginning of the war in Europe “of enlisting into the army, and of sending to the firing lines, many young men of special training in various

⁵⁰ *Munsingwear News*, July 1919, p. 26.

⁵¹ *Munsingwear News*, June 1919, p. 5.

necessary lines of endeavor.” Later, these men were “found to be badly needed, and in fact more necessary to the cause as a whole, back in their original occupations.” A classification of “occupational exemptions” was made, which included the textile industry, and Couper expressed his conviction that a similar classification should be developed in the United States as well. He explained to McGee:

Ours is a textile plant, producing, on a large scale, popular priced underwear—a necessity, not a luxury. In addition to the large volume of commercial business which we had contracted for (direct with retail merchants) we are now at work on heavy orders from the Government for war material—underwear for the soldiers. Our President, Mr. Stowell, is now in Washington arranging for further war work of this nature.⁵²

Couper expressed the fortune of the company that most of its employees were women, but he added that “for this very reason the comparatively small portion of young men in our employ are *extremely necessary* (my italics).” He developed the reason:

They are mostly in quite responsible positions as supervisors, foremen, textile experts, shipping clerks, expert accountants, statisticians, etc., especially trained to the peculiar requirements of this business and such that their replacement engroup [*sic*] would be most difficult and their withdrawal an exceedingly heavy and almost a paralyzing handicap.

Further, he assured McGee the loyalty of the company to the war effort:

We are loyal. We are solidly behind the Government in this just cause. Our record to date proves this. We have taken special pains to investigate, both before and after registration, to see that none of our men would be slackers, though fortunately it proved that none of our men needed such scrutiny. But if our men are of most value to the country at large *here*, they should remain here.

Lastly, the company director asked McGee to give his claims a “careful consideration” and realize that its young male employees were

⁵²Letter from E. J. Couper to John F. McGee by June 11, 1917. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Box 7. F 108. Location 103.L.8.2.F. MHS.

“necessary to our business, and that our business is necessary to the country and to the Department of War.” So, he concluded, “Our young men should be exempt—at least as to the earlier drafts.”

Two days later, the secretary of the commission, John S. Pardee, replied to E. G. Couper’s letter “very respectfully.” He expressed his appreciation to the directors’ “efforts of cooperation with your state body.” The reply was not sent to Mr. Couper, but to Charles L. Pillsbury, chair of the supervisory board and treasurer of the company. Pardee told him that the commission had considered Couper’s letter, but the commission couldn’t do anything at all to the matter, since exemptions were not part of the commission’s agenda. The commission might be consulted about “forming exemption policies,” but it would definitely “not be in position to advise the exemption boards as to any individual.”

Pillsbury replied to Pardee the same day, initially repeating the arguments in Couper’s letter and adding a list of 139 men who had registered for draft, including their ages and positions. He and his colleagues had, however, also found out how other companies in the nation had acted to get their young men exempted:

We call your attention to the fact that the American Telegraph and Telephone Company, the Western Union Telegraph Co., and certain other large corporations instructed their employees in registering to make certain explicit statements regarding reasons for exemption, bearing upon the necessity of the industry in which employed. We did not follow this mode of procedure. We did not consider that the matter of exemption by reason of the need of our industry was at all a personal matter to be claimed individually by our employees. We did not wish to embarrass our young men who are loyal to the Government by suggesting that they ask for or individually give any specific reason therefor. We considered occupational exemption to be strictly a matter of the relation of our manufacturing industry to the country at large and particular to the War Department. We felt that whatever action the Government (through your board or any other agency) may see fit to take with regard to the exemption of our men by reason of the public importance or necessity of their present work with us ought to be considered broadly with respect to this corporation—not individually with respect to the statement and application of each person registered.⁵³

⁵³Letter from Charles Pillsbury to John S. Pardee by June 13, 1917. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Box 7. F 108. Location 103.L.8.2.F. MHS.

Pillsbury's argument is of great interest for several reasons. One is his outspoken gendered bias regarding the employees of the company, although it might have been highly magnified due to the purpose of the letter. Could women really not perform at least some of the male gendered work, such as being secretary to the vice-president, doing book-keeping and statistics, serving as stock and store clerks, composing, operating machines in the laundry department, and being machinists at sewing machines? Couldn't a woman replace a man in the kitchen as cook, assistant chef, dishwasher, and helper? Over and above night work, oiling and cleaning machines were the only operations at the company that women could not perform, since they were prohibited to do so by labor legislation.⁵⁴ In addition to Pillsbury's short-term fear of losing skilled or semi-skilled employees, his argument certainly also reflected a desire to protect men's positions in a gendered division of labor.

The company directors might certainly have been right in claiming that exemption by reason of the needs of an industry was not "a personal matter to be claimed individually" by the employees, but their argumentation makes it appear that they suddenly realized that they had overlooked the possibilities of getting such employees exempted from the draft for war. Indeed, they claimed that directors of other large companies embarrassed their young male employees, when "instructing" them to justify an exemption from the draft by referring to the importance to the war effort of their work. So, either the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company missed the opportunity to encourage male employees of registration age to ask not to be drafted for the war, or they really held the opinion that these employees served the Nation best by producing underwear for the soldiers. Anyhow, the latter view does not conflict with the interest of the directors and the stockholders of the company. Charles L. Pillsbury's letter presents a US company that wanted to appear as more patriotic than many other companies of the time, but when it came to it they were more eager to do "business as usual" and continue to make profits out of the work of the employees of the company.

Whatever caused it, several young men of the Northwestern Knitting Company left for the army, and officially the managers praised them in several volumes of the *Munsingwear News*. In November 1917, the editor

⁵⁴Vocational Information Service by the Women's Occupational Bureau of the Department of Labor and Industries. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*, Location 103.K.7.12.F. MHS.

declared on the front page regarding no one less than the first vice-president of the company E. J. Couper: "The Man Who Served Business Relations of Thirty Years' Standing to Devote His Entire Time to Help Uncle Sam in Making the World Safe for Democracy." In fact, Couper had been organizing the first two Liberty Loan campaigns in Minneapolis, but now he had retired from the company in order to "give all his time and energy and ability during the remainder of the war to Uncle Sam and the YMCA work for the boys at the front." Advertising director William B. Morris assured Couper that "the prayers and best wishes of the big Munsingwear Family will go with him wherever duty may call him."⁵⁵ Certainly, this was a class-biased address that indicated to the employees that leaving the company for the war effort was encouraged, although the directors discreetly tried to exempt young males from being drafted.

In fact, several "Munsingites" did go to the front. The *Munsingwear News* listed those who left for the army and navy, as well as "Returned Service Men." Several of them were portrayed in the company magazine.⁵⁶ On Friday, November 21, 1919, the company arranged "The Event of the Season," when "over 200 Munsingites gathered to show their respect for the men who had entered the service of their country in the world war." A bronze tablet with the names of the 84 drafted workers from the company was unveiled to honor all of them, including Robert Fischer, who "gave his life for the cause." Company president Stowell and his wife led the march to the dining room, and four women of the industrial service department helped the guests to their seats. Charles L. Pillsbury served as the toastmaster and introduced the speakers, including two directors of the company, Dr. Freeman of St. Marks Church, and four representatives of the returned servicemen. The returnees "told what the support and the encouragement of the home folks meant to the boys on the other side and of their pleasure in being remembered by their friends in the Munsingwear plant." Director Morris addressed the topic of "Democracy in Industry,"⁵⁷ but his ideas were not presented to readers of the house organ.

Certainly, the management of the company participated consciously in the active anti-German propaganda that characterized public posters

⁵⁵ *Munsingwear News*, November 1919, pp. 1–3.

⁵⁶ See for instance *Munsingwear News*, January 1919, pp. 12ff.

⁵⁷ *Munsingwear News*, December 1919, p. 5.

in Minneapolis and beyond. In April 1918, the supervisors decided to “immediately” order 3500 of the story “German Efficiency,” which obviously consisted of jokes about Germans and were “written for the purpose of stimulating the purchase of these third issue bonds.” The board further decided to ask for “sample copies” and selected “three other stories, *especially applicable to female employees* [...] to be distributed, not in the pay envelopes” as originally was planned, “but otherwise, at the beginning of, and during the third Liberty Loan drive.” The company purchased the stories as well as the right to reprint them in its own print shop and to add “colored headings [...], connecting the Northwestern Knitting Company with the stories.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any of these gendered anti-German stories, nor what female employees of German descent at the company thought of them.

The *Munsingwear News* published at least one comic that focused on the American generosity to the US allies in Europe, its animosity towards militarized Imperial Germany, and on the contributions to the war effort by employees of the Northwestern Knitting Company. Alluding to *Ten Little Injuns* of the 1860s, later titled *Ten Little Niggers*, Munsingites could read the following poem that more than anything else aimed at increasing the work effort of company employees (Fig. 8.2).

Ten Little Injuns celebrated the gradual disappearance of Native Americans at an earlier stage, and *Ten Little Niggers* did so of the “Negro characters” until there was none left.⁵⁹ *Five Little Munsing Suits* did not celebrate the disappearance of Germans as “the Other,” but the poem does imply anti-German attitudes and that German imperialism could disappear, if “the Munsingites” worked harder than ever and accepted the social order of industrial capitalism. All “Munsingites” could contribute to the defeat of the German Empire, and immigrant workers could confirm their loyalty to the United States and create “One People, One Language, and One Nation” in America. But the mission had an even higher dignity than that.

In “Practical Suggestions for Americanization Work,” of January 11, 1919, the federal Americanization Committee recommended that Native Americans approached foreign-born employees at factories by enlisting

⁵⁸Minutes of Meeting of Supervisory Board, April 2 and April 13, 1918. *Munsingwear Inc., Records*. Box 29. Location 148.G.13.7B. MHS.

⁵⁹Turner, 1994, p. 19.



Fig. 8.2 Five little Munsing suits. *Munsingwear News*, May 1919. Munsingwear Inc., Records. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

the aid of “some prominent citizen in interesting the heads of your factories, mines, etc. in opening classes for the teaching in English, granting time off for such classes, and encouraging naturalization, thus making for better relationship between employer and employee.”⁶⁰ The company directors, however, accepted such a strategy earlier than that.

After the fourth annual picnic in July 1918, the *Minneapolis Journal* reported that the Conservative Republican congressman of Minnesota, Thomas D. Schall, “gave an address on Americanism” to the employees of the Northwestern Knitting Company.⁶¹ Unfortunately there is no evidence of his address, but Schall was invited to speak to the employees at the annual picnic in 1919 as well. The *Munsingwear News* reported that Congressman Schall defined Americanism for “the Munsingites” and pleaded for loyalty to the United States. He also gave Americanism a higher dignity: “Our flag represents human freedom and human equality,” he claimed. It was “the emblem of the most beautiful, the most sacred, the most progressive nation under the sun.” The United States was the most prosperous nation in the world, and it was based on God and Christianity. Congressman Schall explained:

I can’t help but feel that God in His infinite wisdom made the United States Government for a purpose. I can’t help but feel that just as Christ was sent here as an example to mankind, so the Government of the United States was built by God as an example to the governments of the world. The Government of the United States was planted here as a beacon light to the rest of the world—three thousand miles from the governments in Europe.⁶²

Representing Minnesota in Congress and talking to the employees of the largest workplace for women in Minnesota and the largest garment mill in the United States, Schall assured the “Munsingites” that Minnesota and the West was “the greatest” of the country. But, no doubt, the employees at the Munsingwear Corporation knew that they were involved in a project of highest dignity. Being true Americans, the members of the “Munsingwear Family” participated in making “God’s will” come true on earth and in making America First.

⁶⁰Correspondence and Subject Files. “Americanization (4).” Women’s Committee. Box 1. *Minnesota Commission of Public Safety*. Location 103.K.7.9B. MHS.

⁶¹ *Minneapolis Journal*, July 19, 1918.

⁶² *Munsingwear News*, August 1919, p. 9.



CHAPTER 9

The Munsingwear Family of Minneapolis at War: Conclusions

The Northwestern Knitting Company was established in Minneapolis by two inventors from New England as a small-scale garment company in the mid-1880s. A few years later, three leading Anglo-American investors in banking and industry, also with a family background in New England, realized that there was a great potential in knitting and sewing garments. They invested in the company, took over the management of it in the mid-1890s, and expanded the business into the largest workplace for gainfully employed women in Minnesota and the largest mill in the United States for the making of men's underwear. The stockholders and the top directors, partly the same Anglo-American men, made large profits before, during, and after the war, while most women were paid poorly and one-third of them only earned at or below the official subsistence level in Minneapolis. By January 1, 1919, the company was re-named The Munsingwear Inc. in order to exploit its most well-known product, the Munsing Wear.

The main reason for their "Success of Well-Doing," as the company management called a booklet on the profitable making of Munsing Wear, was that the company got a federal state contract to make underwear for the soldiers in the US army and navy.

The support for the entry of the United States into the war was, however, not at all agreed on in Minnesota more generally, where so many inhabitants had German or Scandinavian backgrounds and where organized labor was against the entry of the United States into the war, at least until April 6, 1917. The company, however, was a non-union shop. The

power balance between capital and labor was highly unequal at the company, and the management was involved in a wide range of anti-union activities in Minneapolis. Neither the United Garment Workers of America nor the United Textile Workers of America succeeded in getting the workers at the large and modern garment giant in Minneapolis to join the union. White-collar workers did not even have a union to join in Minneapolis until 1922, when a local of the Stenographers, Bookkeepers, and Typists Union was established and affiliated with the Trades and Labor Assembly of Minneapolis.¹

This study has been guided by three intertwined aims. First, the working conditions and labor relations at the garment giant in Minneapolis are analyzed from a class, a gender, and an ethnic/race perspective. Second, the analysis is focused on the company directors' strategies for making the company's employees identify with the company as the "Munsingwear Family." Third, the analysis is focused on the company management's efforts to make the immigrant workers into "true Americans" and—regardless of national background—into citizens loyal to the US participation in the war on Germany and to shape one nation out of many peoples.

CLASS, GENDER, AND ETHNICITY AT WORK IN "THE MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY"

Most stockholders and all directors but one were men from well-established families of old Anglo-American stock that moved to Minnesota as part of the westward movement of the frontier and the expansion of capitalism. They "had grown from common Yankee entrepreneurial roots" into the oligarchy that ruled Minneapolis. They were involved in several other businesses, and they made up a significant part of the most outstanding bourgeoisie of the expanding city. They joined the same associations and social and cultural clubs, and they partly intermarried to keep control over industrial and banking capital within their families. They were considered to be "men determined to reach success" and "far-sighted men," who recognized the "idle labor supply" of an increasing number of female workers in Minneapolis, and they "had visions of utilizing" them in a context where most industrial work was work for men.

¹Papers of Office Workers, undated, 1920–1948, *Central Labor Union of Minneapolis and Hennepin County, Records*, Box 33, P320, MHS.

In 1918, a good 2500 women of 30 nationalities and a good 500 men earned their living working at the Northwestern Knitting Company. Forty-seven percent of these women identified themselves as American, but several of the American women had a European background two or more generations back in time. Thirty-five percent of the female employees were born in the United States of immigrant parents and claimed another national identity than American. Eighteen percent had immigrated themselves from Europe, individually or in company with their families; only fifty of the immigrants had become naturalized Americans. Most immigrant women came from Sweden, but several others came from Germany and Norway and there were significant clusters of French, Irish, Finnish, and Polish women as well. In contrast to the garment industry in New England, however, only a handful of Italian and of Jewish women were hired to make Munsing Wear.

A great majority of the “army of girls,” a good 2000, were single, and their ages spanned between 16 and 55, although most of them were aged 18–30. Thus, the company management did not exploit child labor against the Minnesota state labor law of 1913 that made it administratively complicated to hire children aged 14–16. Also, the character of work due to mechanization and rationalization may have made child labor redundant and unprofitable, since children had performed the simplest tasks that were easiest to mechanize; indeed, the Northwestern Knitting Company was a modern company regarding technology. Several single women had passed the “marriage bar” of 25 years of age, when women were expected to be married. No fewer than 330 women were married and they included both American women, daughters of immigrants and immigrant women, but married Polish women were overrepresented at the company.

The main reason for married women to work for employers like the Northwestern Knitting Company was the poor earnings of their working-class husbands. Since their husbands’ wages were no “family wage,” the wives had to contribute to the family costs of living and to the reproduction of the working class in Minneapolis. A total of 87 women of different nationalities were widows, and 70 were divorced, separated or deserted. Several of these women had to take care of their children without any support from the fathers. They were probably the most vulnerable of all women, who worked for the Anglo-American men at the garment giant in Minneapolis.

Under half of the single women (950) lived at home and consequently had not loosened the ties with their families, while a good 1100 had done so more or less by moving out from their families. Some of those who lived by themselves or with friends, however, kept some of the family bonds by contributing to the economy of their families, as single wage-earning women were supposed to do. In fact, gainfully employed working-class daughters who lived with their families were supposed to surrender at least a part of their earnings to their family. More than two-thirds of those who lived at home did so and fulfilled the social expectations on them to "remain loyal to the family." Almost one-third of them, however, did not contribute to the family economy and consequently did not pay for parts of their living costs. Maybe some people in Minneapolis and beyond looked down on these women for not supporting their families and even considered them to be on the edge of "going bad"? Moreover, gainfully employed single women who lived at home without paying the full reproduction cost of the labor "into the last penny" were accused by labor activists of making their working-class families subsidize the employer. The employer, accordingly, could reduce the wages below the subsistence level, "speed up the process of capital accumulation," and increase the profits to the capitalists. So, from a labor perspective, it was in general an argument for better wages to pay the families the full cost of the reproduction of the labor force.

More than half of the single women at the Northwestern Knitting Company did not live at home but by themselves or in company with friends. They had left their families in Europe and Minnesota and beyond or had left their families in Minneapolis for some reason. All of them loosened their bonds to their families. Daughters of farmers might even have loosened their bonds to farmers as a class and turned into proletarian workers, while some of them kept their family and class ties by visiting their homes and helped the families at harvest times. Fifteen percent of the women who did not live at home kept their family bonds, regardless of class background, by contributing to the economy of their families.

Gradually, but especially after 1914, the Northwestern Knitting Company developed into a very large industrial plant, and the making of Munsing Wear was characterized by "progressive mechanization and rationalization." The management installed the latest winding, knitting, sewing, washing, and pressing machines when the new plant opened at the end of 1914. Scientific management was introduced in both the

making of the garment and the administration of production. The management established a far-reaching division of work and created "a variety of light, unskilled jobs for low wage labor," and they hired a time study man to make the women work more efficiently and profitably, where the machines did not decide the speed of the work.

Gender was certainly of the greatest importance for the division of work. Men transported most of the goods to, from, and inside the mill, and men serviced the machines, which, with a few exceptions were operated by women. Men also supervised law and order in the mill and checked that the women did not spend too much time in the bathrooms. Some women, though, supervised the work of the many female machine operators by examining and inspecting the garments. There was some social mobility between different tasks from 1918 to 1920, but most women never performed more than one task while working in the mill.

There was some ethnic division of labor. American women dominated the teaching of new employees and the operation of the knitting machines, but in general we cannot conclude that American women monopolized the most prestigious and the better-paid work; skill mattered more than ethnicity for profitable enterprise. Women of Swedish background especially seem to have been quite successful in the making of Munsing Wear, while young Polish women were systematically put to perform the lowest paid and most low-prestige tasks, and married Polish women cleaned the rooms at night. However, some American women also performed low-paid and low-prestige work, which indicate a proletarianization and a pauperization of Americans as well. So, with some exceptions, American women did not monopolize the best paid tasks in the making of Munsing Wear, as is largely argued in previous research. Nor did they, in general, leave blue-collar for white-collar work, as has also generally been claimed in previous research.

The expansion of industrial capitalism included an increasing administration of production, which also occurred in Minneapolis and at the Northwestern Knitting Company. In 1920, there were 20 foremen, 5 male supervisors and 24 male clerks and 8 young male trainees on the Munsingwear office payroll. Most of them held prestigious positions and were pretty well paid. Another 31 men were hired, mostly as supervisors and foremen of other departments but organizationally connected to the payroll department. Few of the men in the offices had very much to do with the directors in their daily working life, but they had considerable influence over the work of other office employees.

The enlargement of industrial administration coincided with a significant feminization of white-collar work, and there was a significant feminization of the administration of the making of Munsing Wear. In 1918, a total of 62 women were hired for clerical work, 11 for bookkeeping, another 11 for billing, 13 were stenographers and another 5 were typists. These women were aged 18–33, so some were beyond “the marriage bar”. In general, the stenographers and the typists were American women, while those who performed general clerical work and billing were Americans and daughters of immigrants, and the bookkeepers were daughters of immigrants. So, American women dominated, but they did not monopolize female office work.

As already indicated, it is not true that women replaced men in office work as previous research has claimed. Several men were still employed at the Northwestern Knitting Company in 1920, and most of them held positions as rather well-paid and prestigious mid-level managers and supervisors. However, a few women at work in the Munsingwear offices replaced old-fashioned male supervisors and clerks: the employment agent, the cashier, the head bookkeeper, one clerical supervisor, one cost clerk, and the two office supervisors. All of them earned pretty well. Certainly, the secretaries to the president and to the treasurer also held prestigious and well-paid positions but, unlike their male forerunners, they were—due to their sex—not expected to advance to become company managers themselves. Most of the advanced female white-collar workers were American, while one of them was born in Sweden and another two were daughters of Swedish immigrants and claimed Swedish nationality. So, not even well-paid and prestigious white-collar work was monopolized by American women as has been claimed in the US historiography.

Moreover, the social secretary and her assistant secretaries, the nurse, and the editor of the *Munsingwear News* held highly respected positions. These positions were newly established. At least the social secretaries and the nurse performed caring work that was traditionally coded as women’s work, so traditional concepts of gender imprinted the caring part of the organization of new bureaucratic business.

Nor is it true that the nineteenth-century clerk had not only turned into a proletarian but into a woman. Employers developed a far-reaching gendered division of white-collar work, where men were put to perform some, mostly prestigious tasks and women other, mostly monotonous and tedious tasks. In 1920, no less than 80% of the female employees

in the offices, 278 women, performed that kind of work. Whether these women “turned into a proletarian” or not will certainly not be possible to verify, since we cannot say much about their dispositions and their identification regarding social relations at work. We can, though, conclude that they held subordinate and low-paid positions as white-collar workers. The main reason for this class-biased gender division of work is to be found in the introduction of new technology and of the principles of scientific management that the Munsingwear directors hired specialists to carry out. The employment of women went hand in hand with mechanization of office work and the introduction of new tasks, but women did not challenge the gender power balance merely by their entry into office work. Either they were hired for new positions that had not existed before and, thus, were not coded as men’s work, or they took monotonous and tedious tasks that men did not mind getting rid of. They operated machines in a similar way as female blue-collar workers operated the knitting and sewing machines, although their working day was shorter than that of blue-collar workers; in 1920, 93 hours in a two-week period instead of 104. They performed tasks that were designed as part of the far-reaching division of work and that did not imply the start of a career to become a mid- or top-level manager of the company but were part of making a gendered class of white-collar workers.

Feminization of office work was more than anything else based on the division of labor in the offices, mechanization, and the interplay of class and gender. Ethnicity was important, since “American” women dominated female white-collar work, especially where knowledge of English was crucial, but ethnicity did not matter totally for positions like fore(wo)men, supervisors and mid-level managers. Nor were daughters of immigrants barred from prestigious white-collar work, since women of German and Scandinavian descent also held such positions. With a few exceptions, though, Finnish and Polish women were not invited to work in the offices of the company.

THE MAKING OF “THE MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY”

The non-existence of a trade union at the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc. did not imply that the employees were satisfied with labor relations and working conditions. They could protest against poor earnings, tedious and monotonous tasks and anti-union activities in other ways than joining a trade union, for instance by

leaving the company for another employer. In fact, faced with absenteeism and labor turnover many employers in the United States, including the directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc., developed welfare programs to compensate for the negative aspects of modern industrial capitalism to encourage workers stay with them. Next to the aggressive anti-unionism, that program seems to be the main reason why the workers of the “Munsingwear Family” did not join the union. The second aim of this study has been to analyze the welfare program and other paternal initiatives that the company directors developed to make the employees affiliated with the company, the “Munsingwear Family,” and to increase the efficiency of production. Such programs were especially intended to encourage the “cultural transformation” of immigrants by promoting attitudes that should socialize them, especially women, to industrial work and to “stave off union recognition.” Indeed, they were both class and gender biased.

In 1910, the directors initiated the first profit-sharing program for a limited group of top and mid-level established male managers who were offered the opportunity to buy stocks in the company. No rank-and-file workers, not even skilled ones, were included in the program, and it was gendered, since no woman was considered to be a “deserving” employee. Moreover, that program was quite biased regarding ethnicity, since all “deserving men” but two were Anglo-American. The other parts of the welfare program were, however, designed for blue-collar workers, especially working-class women.

Labor turnover was on the agenda of the Munsingwear directors’ board all through the 1910s. It caused the company economic costs and wasted energy, since new workers were less efficient than experienced ones, and managers thought that new workers depressed and discouraged even old and experienced workers. One supervisor claimed that a “normal” labor turnover of just 10–12% would increase production by 40%. The directors developed several programs to get workers to stay in the employ of the company by offering a small addition to the wages as a premium, but they were not very successful, even when they reduced their aspirations to have the workers attend work every day in a period of two weeks instead of one year. At first, only blue-collar workers were considered to be a labor turnover problem, so the premium program was both class biased and, in practice, also gendered since most of the blue-collar workers were women. Ethnicity, though, did not matter. Later, the directors offered female white-collar workers a paid vacation to

get them back to work after the summer break, so the gender bias of the labor turnover problem and its solution increased when the number of white-collar workers with tedious and monotonous tasks increased. Even when the directors raised the wages for all employees due to the high costs of living during the war, they asked the employees for their “continued support, confidence and cooperation.”

The broad welfare program for “Munsingites” was developed in connection with the large expansion and the opening of the new plant at the end of 1914. It hardly looks like a coincidence that the directors initiated that program and developed other paternal enterprises right after the only documented labor conflict at the company in mid-1914. Although the strike was limited in size, the director knew that women workers at their company *might* go on strike and stop production even without a union.

In 1914, a social secretary was hired to solve any problem that women in the employ of the company faced, and later two assistants were hired and a social service department was established to make the female employees in particular feel connected with the company. The industrial secretaries had their background in the settlement house movement that aimed at bridging class antagonism and ethnic animosity. They hired employees, so male foremen were dispossessed of parts of their power. A medical department was inaugurated in 1914 to give first aid and medical relief to all sick and injured employees during work hours. It included 12 beds, and help was given by two medical doctors, a dentist, and a nurse. One of the doctors was an eye specialist who focused on “the girls” because good eyesight was a precondition for efficient work at the knitting and sewing machines. That part of medical care was certainly gendered. In general, “safety first” was added to scientific management to make a modern industrial plant, and in return the employees were expected not to report the accidents to the workmen’s compensation authorities. Moreover, employees did not have to leave the plant to find a dentist or a doctor downtown but could often be back at work soon.

The cafeteria was another part of the welfare program that made it unnecessary for employees to leave the plant for lunch and risk being late for work again. In fact, the Northwestern Knitting Company was a forerunner in Minneapolis among industrial plants in offering the employees a good meal at a reasonable cost that also in turn made the employees into more efficient workers in the afternoon and reduced the risks of afternoon accidents at work and requests for sick leave. Moreover, a couple of rest rooms and a library gave the employees recreation and relief during the noon break.

The Employees' Mutual Benefit Association (EMBA), established in 1915, was a cornerstone of the welfare program that was initiated by the company management in response to the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1913. The company laid the economic foundation, while individual members entered the EMBA free of charge but had to pay a monthly fee that was withdrawn from the wage. The association was open for every "Munsingite" and run by trusted employees. Although they had no need for the economic support that was paid to sick and injured members, the directors also became members just to underline that it was a matter for "the Munsingwear Family." The company magazine encouraged all blue- and white-collar workers to join the association, and it arranged a race between the different departments of the company regarding membership. At the end of 1919, close to 84% of the employees were members, so the strategy of the company management was successful. Since a member who left the company lost his or her monthly fees, the arrangement certainly was a way of getting employees to stay with the company as well. To make sure that no employee abused the system, no reimbursement was paid until the board had received a doctor's certificate that the member really was so sick or injured that s/he could not work. Moreover, the board established visiting committees to visit a member who stayed away from work due to sickness. Certainly, the "detective ladies" were a controlling body, but the home visitors could also be presented as a caring body for sick members of "the Munsingwear Family."

The most important body to make the employees affiliated with the company was the *Munsingwear News*, which was distributed monthly for free to every member of "the Munsingwear Family." It was controlled by the company management but employees were encouraged to contribute (positive) views on the company. The very first issue of the magazine had a picture of the huge plant on the front cover and in addition the readers could learn that the company was a "factory where life is worthwhile" and an institution that all "Munsingites" loved and were proud of being a part of. It was the HOME OF THE BIG MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY. That family metaphor characterized the subsequent issues. The editor announced that the company magazine was published in order to compensate for the anonymity at work due to the extension and the far-reaching division of labor, to educate the employees, and to inform them on issues "pertaining to health and efficiency."

The *Munsingwear News* presented a company that was detached from the problems of labor turnover that concerned the company directors.

One way of doing that was to have employees to testify their appreciation of the company and its officers and directors in words of overflowing kindness. Most of the contributors were female, which, once again, indicates that the labor turnover issue was gendered. If the testimonies were genuine, the directors had been very successful in making "the Munsingwear Family." If they were fictions and arranged by the editor, they instead bore witness to a company that indeed was struggling with the loyalty of its (female) employees. Likewise, the view in the *Munsingwear News* was far removed from the views of women's work and working women's social and living conditions that were presented in, for instance, the survey of working women by the Minneapolis branch of the Young Women's Christian Association in 1919. In communication with "the Munsingites," the company management hardly acknowledged any problems at all. Everyone at work for the Anglo-American men at the company, especially women, should have no doubts about the idea of "The Big Happy Munsingwear Family."

The most spectacular appearance of the family metaphor, however, was seen at the annual winter and summer parties that the management arranged for the employees. Not only were the employees served food and entertainment, but they could also poke fun at the directors in a way that is reminiscent of the medieval carnivals, when the under-class could poke fun at the powerbrokers for one day a year and then return to their structural subordination the following day. The paternal aspect of the parties was especially evident when the party was arranged on the birthday of the company president and the "Pater" (Father) celebrated his anniversary with his "Family". Indeed, the parties reinforced the gendered and class-biased labor relations at the company. Moreover, they exploited race prejudices to unite all "Munsingites" into a white, class-bridging imagined community by promoting blackfacing and the Munsingwear Mixed Minstrels.

The directors did not fully trust the family metaphor, however, but involved progressive movements and social workers in the making of a class of non-unionized and efficient blue- and white-collar female workers. The Women's Trade Union League, the Women's Welfare League, several settlement houses and, especially, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) had branches in Minneapolis that were actively involved in helping working women not to "go wrong" in the expanding city and to make the women into conscientious workers. The YWCA in particular cooperated closely with the management of the Northwestern

Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc., although its president initially was very negative to an “intrusion” by any outsider into his business. He changed his mind during the war and realized that the YWCA could be very supportive in making the women at work into efficient and “respectable Munsingites”.

MAKING “THE MUNSINGWEAR FAMILY” INTO LOYAL AMERICANS

The third aim of this study has been to analyze the company directors’ efforts to make the immigrant workers into “true Americans” and to make all employees—regardless of national background—loyal to the US war on Germany.

Although Minnesota was a multicultural and multilingual social and political context without unanimous support for the entry of the United States into the war on Germany, most of the political leadership of Minnesota backed US participation in the war fully and intensified the Americanization of the state that had started a decade or two earlier to help immigrants to be integrated into their new society. With the entry of the United States into the war, the Americanization process changed significantly and aimed to unite all residents as one people, speaking one language, and making one nation. Americanization turned into Anglo-Americanization. On April 17, 1917, the Minnesota legislature gave legal authority to the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety under the leadership of an anti-labor corporation attorney. This “Watchdog of Loyalty” was to insure that all inhabitants in Minnesota were made into Anglo-Americans through a crusade for “100 percent Americanism.” Also, it defended the existing social order from all kinds of radicalism. The commission targeted both national disloyalty and labor attacks on capitalism, and in these efforts it included the University of Minnesota, public libraries, progressive movements like the YWCA and the settlement houses as well as workplaces with many immigrant employees. It also had a gendered agenda, since its Women’s Committee implied that the state “tried to use its women-power” for the first time in history.

The directors of the Northwestern Knitting Company also supported President Wilson’s declaration of war fully, and the company president expected every employee—regardless of national background—to be loyal to the war efforts and to act as “true” Americans. One reason for the directors’ policy might have been their Anglo-American heritage in New England that their families or they themselves carried with them in

the westward expansion of industrial capitalism. The main reason, however, was the very profitable contract that the company signed with the federal government to make underwear for the men in the army and navy. The management considered the company to be part of the home front as "Camp Munsingwear," while at the same time the directors could, in fact, expand their business and profit handsomely from the war.

It was of course necessary for employees to be able to read English to understand the ideological message in the house organ, the *Munsingwear News*, but the value of reading and speaking English went far beyond that within the Americanization program. The English-reading Munsingites could read and learn that English was necessary for them to learn about "democracy," to "remain loyal Americans at heart," and to "properly understand" the US government. They were expected to read about these matters in an American newspaper or magazine, since reading about them in "a loyal" one in "a foreign tongue" would not result in "whole-hearted sympathy with American institutions." Consequently, the company management arranged evening classes in English and "Citizenship training," headed by teachers from the university. Those who passed the classes of the Munsingwear Americanization School were honored at a banquet and in the *Munsingwear News*. "Students" testified officially to the value of the classes.

The company management also participated in the federal Liberty Loans and War Savings Stamps campaigns. Those in power considered buying bonds to be an action of great symbolic value. The first campaign in April 1917, however, was not very successful in Minnesota, so the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety (the Watchdog of Loyalty) intervened and told immigrants, especially those of German origin, that buying bonds was "the cheapest way and the quickest way" to enter into "the ranks of Americans citizens." Accordingly, the succeeding campaigns were successful even among immigrant workers and women at the Northwestern Knitting Company/the Munsingwear Inc.

The company management supported the campaigns wholeheartedly and expended a lot of energy getting the employees to buy bonds, and it helped them to buy the bonds by prepaying them and then deducting the payment from the wages until the bonds were fully paid before handing them over to the employees. They organized Liberty Bond meetings in the plant, where they mixed political speeches with entertainment. The plan to sell bonds to employees was designed so that not even low-paid women could avoid showing their loyalty, and the sale of bonds

was organized in practical terms by the supervisors of every department of the large plant. The strategies were successful, and the management made a big point of the fact that so many of its employees bought bonds, and they exploited the success officially to enhance the image of the company as a workplace where so many workers, especially immigrants, supported the war efforts and thereby identified themselves as “true” and loyal Americans.

The editor of the house organ assured every reader that the “Munsingites not only dedicated the work of their hands and minds to help the winning of the war—they also put their hearts into it.” The company president even declared that loyalty to the United States was simply a logical corollary to their loyalty to the company as members of “the Munsingwear Family.” Moreover, the *Munsingwear News* applauded the male employees who left the company for the fronts in Europe, although the directors tried to have them exempted from the draft. In fact, patriotism reinforced the class-bridging concept of “the Munsingwear Family” by giving “the family” tasks of greater dignity to perform than just being loyal to the company. The company management, moreover, exploited patriotism beyond all limits to make the workers work harder to make Munsing Wear for the soldiers at the front and thereby also to increase the profits to the owners and the directors of the Munsingwear Company. In fact, Munsingwear was one of the companies in the United States that pioneered development of paternalistic welfare programs for its workers, especially for its female employees. The company expanded those initiatives during “the Great War” into a program for making immigrant workers into “true” Americans and pressuring all employees to be loyal to the US war effort.

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