Following the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in June 1933, thousands of Philadelphia workers joined the ranks of organized labor, revitalizing the flagging craft unions and, more importantly, developing new industrial unions. Labor activists understood, however, that their recent organizing achievements had rested primarily on New Deal legislative initiatives. As the tremendous original excitement began to abate, union leaders fretted over the continuance of their organizations. They realized that their fledgling unions might disappear in the long process of negotiating labor contracts, especially under renewed employer resistance and the dominant anti-union political system in the city. Mass participation at the local level was critical for successful maintenance of these new organizations. But such mass participation was complicated by the fact that industrial unions included women, immigrants, and unskilled workers who had little or no tradition of organization.1

*I would like to thank Peter Albert, Ken Fones-Wolf, Stuart Kaufman, and Grace Palladino for their valuable suggestions and criticisms.

1 James R. Green, The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America (New York, 1980), 140-63, Irving Bernstein, The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941 (Boston, 1970), 217-313 Another important source of union cultural activities emerged from the traditions of immigrant radical political movement, but this element is beyond the scope of this study.
In response to this organizational challenge, union leaders drew upon a complex mixture of craft-union traditions, recent experience with welfare capitalism, and surviving working-class customs and values. Implicit in this revitalization of union culture was a critical political perspective. Unionists of all—not just radical left-wing—types became involved in labor movement culture and active in the political arena. Worker theater, union-sponsored athletics, and labor education promoted a distinctly class, as opposed to mass, perspective. At the same time, however, union cultural events were to some degree manipulative—leaders utilized leisure time activities to persuade reluctant members to pay dues. But the widespread appeal of cultural activities demonstrates their deep roots in working-class life.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Philadelphia's artisans and skilled factory workers had exerted a considerable influence in the city's social, economic, and political life. Through their unions, craftsmen commanded high wages and limited access to their trades. Pride and skill at the workplace translated into independence in the community. Skilled workers in Kensington or Nicetown, for example, became home owners, supported voluntary organizations, and maintained a respectable lifestyle equal to that of the middle class. Craft unions also encouraged feelings of fraternalism through beneficial systems and union-sponsored social activities. Politicians in working-class wards catered to unions by supporting labor legislation, giving patronage to union shops, and granting the eight-hour day to city workers. In addition, the political clubs of both parties made special efforts to curry the support of skilled workers.

Underlying the solidarity of skilled workers was a rich associational life. Philadelphia craft unions sponsored banquets, picnics, and smokers that developed sentiments of mutuality and fellowship among members of their trade. Craft workers also participated in more general forms of popular recreation. Theaters catered to working-class audiences by specializing in comedies and melodramas based on local

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themes. Skilled workers dominated popular athletic clubs that were closely identified with factories and neighborhoods. Organized labor demonstrated its power and pride through large parades and demonstrations with workers often dressed in the costume of their craft. Massive labor celebrations highlighted patriotic holidays. In addition, inter-union social affairs and mutual assistance during times of struggle reinforced a sense of community solidarity and class self-reliance.3

These working-class community traditions continued into the 1920s though muted by certain economic and social developments. Large and small employers launched a vigorous open-shop drive buttressed by judicial decisions outlawing many of labor's traditional weapons. At the same time, the prosperity of the twenties induced some workers to embrace consumerism or move to the newer street-car suburbs of Northeast or West Philadelphia.4 Many workers devoted leisure time to commercial amusements or professional sports that vied with older neighborhood and work-based recreational pursuits. Finally, organized labor's public demonstrations often gave way to the planned civic celebrations of the city's elite. Still, some sections of Philadelphia—notably Manayunk, Nicetown, and Kensington—retained a distinctive working-class character. In Kensington, for instance, workers continued to participate in benefit associations, fraternal orders, ethnic clubs, and unions that reinforced an alternative working-class culture.5

Alongside the vestiges of craft-union traditions, the twenties witnessed the development in many of the city's large modern factories of an elaborate structure of control that came to be known as welfare capitalism. In modern bureaucratized workplaces, mechanization, the division of labor, and an impersonal hierarchical factory system alien-


ated employees, thus reducing individual incentives, company loyalty and morale. To combat these problems and to undermine further any continuing worker militancy, several large employers including Disston’s Saws, Cramp’s shipyards, and Philco turned to welfare work. Through welfarism, which reached its zenith in the mid 1920s, they hoped to create a sense of unity and purpose within a more productive workforce. Recreational activities, including sports, company bands, social clubs, and educational programs were designed to offset the boredom of factory labor and promote self-betterment. Pensions, stock-sharing, safety programs, medical facilities, and insurance or savings plans encouraged worker loyalty and company stability. Finally, through company outings and employee magazines, corporations hoped to bind workers and management together as part of the company family.6

The company family concept, however, failed to survive hard times. The depression undermined management’s system of work control as economic constraints forced employers to abandon expensive welfare programs. High unemployment destroyed factory stability and subjected workers to the petty tyranny of the foreman. Disillusioned workers turned against their companies and the conservative political system. Their protest and demands for relief paved the way for the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in June 1933 and the resurgence of union activity. The NIRA, among its provisions, guaranteed workers the right to organize unions of their own choosing and to participate in collective bargaining.7

Beginning in the summer of 1933, a large number of employees throughout the country joined unions, many workers joining for the first time. Mass rank-and-file participation reached an unprecedented level. In Philadelphia, three thousand workers began organizing at the Edward G. Budd Manufacturing Company, and in September, Fed-


7 David Brody, Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth-Century Struggle (New York, 1980), 74-8, 133-77; Green World of the Worker, 140.
eral Labor Union (FLU) 18763 of auto workers obtained a charter from the AFL. Other industrial unions emerged later that month at the South Philadelphia Westinghouse Turbine works and at the Atwater-Kent factory in Germantown. In July, after a short strike, over ten thousand workers organized the Philco Radio and Television Company. In the garment trades, millinery workers organized for the first time as Local 45 of the International Hat, Cap, and Millinery Workers' Union, and finishers formed Local 156 of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), the first female ACWA local in Philadelphia.8

The question of how to retain the newly organized industrial workers' enthusiasm and loyalty became a vital issue. Local activists in these new industrial unions realized the need to develop a sense of shared objectives and camaraderie among workers. These attitudes were especially lacking in large industrial plants where workers, often of varied ethnic backgrounds, were segmented in large departments and worked on only a small piece of a bigger production job. It was only natural that the unions would adopt some of the techniques of welfare capitalism that employers had so recently used to address comparable problems. At the same time, industrial union leaders borrowed elements from the more insulated craft-union traditions. Officers of the new Millinery Workers' union understood that a "union that merely negotiates with reference to wages and hours and is placed in the position of talking bread and butter, cannot long survive." Only through a wide variety of activities could the union "cement the bonds that are an indispensible requirement for the [union's] success."9


Recreation was one of the first mechanisms utilized by union leaders to reach industrial workers. Sports easily attracted workers and helped create a sense of group solidarity among people who might rarely associate outside the shop. The use of athletics also drew on the past experiences of Philadelphia unions. At the turn of the century, for example, printers and hatters competed in baseball leagues, while other crafts sponsored competitions in rowing, bowling, basketball, and cycling. Amid the great upsurge in unionism in the 1930s, however, labor activists came to a greater appreciation of how sports could interest workers in the union. Hosiery Workers' education director Lawrence Rogin noted that sports could "keep up the morale of the new as well as the older members." The Joint Board of the ACWA, which since its founding in 1929 had tried to promote the unions as a social and cultural center, in 1934 operated a gym with a shower, handball courts, and sauna rooms, provided horseback riding lessons, and organized basketball and bowling leagues. The Philco union created an extensive sports program designed to "appeal to every member," either as a participant or spectator. The Athletic Committee sponsored riding classes and boxing and wrestling matches. The more athletically talented Philco employees competed on union teams in the basketball, baseball, soccer, and bowling industrial leagues. Others played in interdepartmental league games that often featured dancing afterwards to attract a large crowd. Special events such as the annual married-versus-single baseball game brought together workers from the various departments who had little contact at the workplace.

For those not attracted to athletics, the union offered social gatherings. Carefully planned picnics in the summer or dances in the colder months were important mass events for many locals. Among many others, International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) Local 15 and the United Brewery and Soft Drink Workers of Phila-

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delphia held annual picnics. In August 1937, the Philadelphia United Shoe Workers District planned its first annual picnic and outing, promising a baseball game and union band. ACWA finishers Local 156, "Philadelphia's first woman's army," celebrated their achievements and victories through their first annual dance. Smaller gatherings brought workers into closer contact. For example, the Entertainment Committee of the Millinery Workers arranged a card party in January 1935 featuring door prizes and radio games in an effort to provide the members "with good feeling, with sociability, in simple words, with a good time." Longtime Philco worker, Eleanor Reed, remembered regularly attending Saturday night dances held at the Labor Lyceum.\(^\text{13}\)

According to historians Bryan Palmer and Gregory Kealey, beyond simply providing a good time, dances and other entertainments reinforced "notions of working-class self-help and mutual assistance."\(^\text{14}\) They stimulated a group consciousness that had political implications at variance with corporate-sponsored cultural programs. For instance, the Textile Workers sponsored a ball to aid the formation of youth activities and devoted their annual Textile Ball to raising funds for organizing fellow workers. In March 1939, ILGWU Local 15 held its second annual Ball and Floor Show to increase the local's loan fund that aided members in distress. The Fur Workers Annual Ball in 1937 was designed to raise funds for an upcoming strike and, with other activities, "develop a close unity among workers which will in time bring about better conditions in the shop."\(^\text{15}\)


\(^\text{15}\) LaMar, *Clothing Workers in Philadelphia*, 204-6; ACWA Local 110, minutes, May 8, 1934, ACWA Phil. Records; "Educational Work in ACW Organizations, 1934-36," ACWA Phil. Records.
To many union leaders, however, creating social ties was merely the first step in maintaining the union. They turned to formal workers’ education to assimilate raw recruits into Philadelphia’s union army, a program derived from the small but influential left-sponsored worker education activities of the twenties. Labor educators believed that members needed to be given the intellectual tools to function effectively as unionists in the mill and at union meetings. Some, such as labor educator Ben Barkas, promoted programs that incorporated a humanistic curriculum, hoping to politicize workers and prepare them to change their society. Thousands of unionists took advantage of make-shift classrooms throughout Philadelphia. Drawing on the services of Works Progress Administration (WPA) teachers, the Philco local offered classes three nights a week at Union Hall in public speaking, writing, parliamentary law, labor law, union procedures, current events, shop economics, and politics to “make as many workers as possible trade union conscious, and more socially aware of their status in society.” The Paint, Lead, Varnishers and Color Makers Union and the Fur Workers hoped that their “History of the Labor Movement” courses would enable members to learn the objectives of their unions, develop themselves politically, and assume leadership roles. Believing that intelligent and well-informed members were the best guarantee of a strong unions, the ACWA sponsored open forums built around current issues in the labor movement, including such topics as legislation, arbitration, and the government’s role in labor relations. Discussion groups met during the hour before the regular Amalgamated local meetings, and locals devoted a portion of their sessions to education lectures. At one such presentation, ACWA Brother Leo Krzycki, “with a facile tongue and with his gift for dramatics,” portrayed “a vivid picture of existing conditions today and the abominable system in which we are living, where in the midst of plenty people must go unclothed and unfed.” He concluded that only with the “education of the masses and their realization of their power can we hope to attain the rights to which we are entitled.”


17 Sara Fredgant interview with author, Feb. 27, 1984; Harry Block interview; Microphone, Jan., Feb., 1935; ULR, Apr. 6, 1934; Fur Workers No. 53, minutes, June 8, 1937; “Educational Work in ACW Organizations, 1934-36;” Nora Piore to Elinor Herrick, Feb. 12, 1936, Education Department files, ACWA Phil. Records; ACWA Local 110, minutes, Dec. 19, 1937; Report of the Education Committee of the Joint Board, Jan. 16, 1936, in ACWA Phil. Records.
Large local unions—those with thousands of members—developed a labor press to educate and communicate with their membership. Newspapers, journals, or newsletters, published at the plant or local level, functioned as educational forums. The Millinery Workers expected its bulletin to fortify the position of the local and help create "a common group, a common tribunal." It would "serve as a clearing house for the expression of our sorrow and our joys, for the story of our day by day lives." Some of these union papers were similar to earlier company-sponsored employee magazines, both usually carried news of recreational and educational activities, department gossip, humor, editorials, and announcements of special events in the personal lives of employees. In January 1935, for example, the Philco local's paper, *The Microphone*, congratulated the Pelusos on their ninth anniversary and the Anatuccis on their birth of a baby boy, while announcing the marriage of Ernest Brown and Betty Booth. The Perrys used its columns to thank the employees of Departments 28 and 78 for aid rendered during their recent bereavement. The gossip column for Department 78 speculated that "If Paul Compton keeps on gaining weight, he will have to go on a two-way stretch."18

Personal and humorous items built interest in the journal while encouraging workers to turn to the more serious portions including articles, editorials, and announcements. Disston Steel Workers Lodge 1073, through its journal *The Melting Pot*, urged members to participate in union elections. "The Washroom Orator" cartoon chided members about missing meetings and gossiping. Articles outlining the progress of the union and analyzing social, economic, and political issues helped politicize the membership. *The Microphone* performed much the same role for Philco union leaders. Indeed editor Richard P. Roberts saw a direct link between social and cultural activities and political development. He discussed in the journal problems with the NRA, the Wagner-Connery Labor Disputes Bill, the possibility of forming a Labor Party, and the history of social fascism in England and Germany. The May 1935 issue explained the necessity of collective action, arguing that industrialization and mechanization had made the "workman a mere cog in the machinery of production." As a result, the

typical worker had “lost his economic power, lost his individuality, lost much of his interest in work, and lost his security of employment.” Editors such as Roberts strove to develop a political culture leading to workplace gains and increased social consciousness.  

One special problem confronting industrial unionists, one not often faced by their craft-union predecessors, concerned the large number of women in mass-production industries. Most female wage earners, even more than their male counterparts, lacked union traditions. Further, the male-dominated atmosphere of many union gatherings and the demands of running a household in addition to their factory work inhibited women’s involvement. Recognizing these problems, unions tried to involve women in leadership roles. The Fur Workers, for example, asked women members to elect two representatives to their Executive Board. To provide women with the knowledge and confidence necessary to take an active role, the Philco local supported the Mt. Ives summer school for women workers. Louise Milevoi’s attendance at the 1935 session taught her that “our paid Union officers are not the Union and that without our support there is very little they can do.”

Local leaders believed that women might be more comfortable with activities that excluded male workers. Pantsmaker Jennie Previti, secretary of the ACWA education board, contended that if a women’s meeting sounded mysterious, workers would attend out of curiosity. She suggested enticing members by advertising the meeting as “For Women Only; A well-known member of our organization will speak woman to woman on some problem confronting women today.” Previti predicted that “they would think it would be a talk on birth control and the hall would not be large enough.” Her efforts were part of the ACWA’s 1934 drive to activate members, particularly women. It established a Women’s Activity Committee with five rep-

20 Leslie Tender, Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930 (New York, 1979); Schatz, Electrical Workers, 30-34; Green, World of the Workers, 166-9; Stella Nowicki, interviewed by Alice and Staughton Lynd, Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working Class Organizers (Princeton, 1981), 83-4, recalled that women viewed the union as a “man’s thing” and believed that their responsibilities were at home. Sally Cohen and George “Chick” Wentz, interview with author, Feb. 23, 1984; Microphone, July, Aug.-Sept. 1935; Fur Workers No. 53, minutes, June 15, 1937.
resentatives from each local to coordinate female clubs and athletic programs.\textsuperscript{21} The Philco union, hoping to involve the nearly three thousand women in the local, ran a women's column in\textit{ The Microphone, “Our Beauty Shoppe, A Page for Our Girls,”} established a girl's club and sponsored special "feminine" education activities. Union members participated in cooking lessons, studied fashion and heard lectures on such topics as marriage and sex hygiene. Socializing and unionism were combined at a December 1934 girl's club radio and card party at which Edna L. Reigh of the Women's Trade Union League urged the women to take an active part in their local.\textsuperscript{22}

Labor activists tried to direct traditional informal gatherings of workers into a union context. Emphasizing the idea of the union as a family helped break down barriers and create a sense of solidarity among industrial workers. Two long-time Philco unionists, Eleanor Reed and Sally Cohen, recalled the importance of a family feeling in their labor experiences, buttressed by informal association and casual gatherings at the union hall. Clothing workers were encouraged to gather at the Amalgamated Center; Philco workers, at the Social Club in Union Hall—to play pool, darts, and cards or to simply read, sit, and rest with fellow unionists.\textsuperscript{23}

Union leaders cultivated a feeling of "togetherness" as a means of strengthening their organizations. Executive Board members frequently attended the weddings of members and their families. Likewise, they prodded members to wear union buttons as a sort of family identification. In fact, the industrial union family, like the earlier craft union or company families, promised to care for its members. United Electrical Workers Local 105 sponsored group insurance and a consumers' union. ACWA Local 110, believing that members owed each other "a sense of duty and obligation," set up a relief fund, and Fur Workers Local 53 provided a hospitalization plan. Philco unionists provided a Legal Aid Bureau and a dental plan and arranged discounts


\textsuperscript{22} Microphone, June, July, Sept., Oct. 1934.

for the purchase of coal. Mutual aid and union-sponsored activities outside the plan all helped develop a "deep emotional consciousness of interdependence and solidarity" that gave workers new power within the factory.24

Ironically, the mechanisms for creating power in the workplace borrowed to a great extent from devices with which employers had hoped to prevent union organizing. The Philco plant perhaps best exemplifies the way in which a union expropriated a program of welfare capitalism. The Philco company underwrote an extensive welfare plan. Workers bowled, played baseball and basketball, and ran track and field in interdepartmental leagues organized by the Philco Athletic Association. The company sponsored group health and accident insurance, and the welfare department furnished coal and groceries. In 1931, the "Welfare Visitor" went to four thousand houses "sometimes amid the squalor of ill-kept homes and sometimes in neat and well appointed ones where want and straightened financial circumstances are comparatively new," to determine actual need and want. Social activities included fishing expeditions, "moonlight" dances, annual field days, Christmas parties, and a String Band which competed in the Mummers' Parade. News of all these activities, humorous stories, department gossip, and company announcements filled the Philco Flash, the company magazine.25

Despite these efforts to woo their employees, Philco workers struck on July 11, 1933, to protest the lengthening of the workday from eight to ten hours. Four days later the company signed a contract throwing out the company union and recognizing the independent union. The new body, chartered as Radio and Television FLU 18368, immediately began social, athletic, welfare, and educational activities. Local activists, believing that "the backbone of many company unions is reputed to be based on such activities," hoped to shift any residual allegiances from the company to the union. The union took over the

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24 ACWA Local 110, minutes, Mar. 20, July 31, 1934; ILGWU No. 11 (cutters) minutes, Nov. 23, 27, Dec. 7, 1937, ILGWU Joint Board Records; Fur Workers No. 53, minutes, Mar. 21, 1940; Microphone, June 1934, Mar. 1936; United Electrical and Radio Workers of America Local 105, minutes, May 10, Aug. 9, 1940, United Electrical and Radio Workers of America Local 105 Records, Urban Archives, Temple Univ. (hereafter UE No. 105, minutes); Harry Block interview.

athletic activities and formed a welfare committee to visit those in need. In order to reorient the annual field day away from the company, its site was changed from the Philco-sponsored Country Club to a local park. Jack Griffin, the musical and show director of the union's social club, organized entertainment. The union expanded the range of social and educational activities, sponsoring Rad-Tel radio, hiking, gun, string band, chess, checkers, and camera clubs, card tournaments, and the Rad-Tel Public Forum where union members discussed such topics as the banking system, the stock market, the history of the Constitution, Congress, and current events. The Grand Annual Ball, fishing trips, annual excursions to Atlantic City, and the Radio and TV Social Club with floor shows, dancing, and local talent nights drew union members together. All these activities were publicized in the union journal, *The Microphone*, which was published in the same format as the company journal. As Harry Block, an early leader of the Philco workers recalled, the union took much of the structure of the company's existing welfare program and used it as a basis for strengthening their local.\(^{26}\) This union program, however, differed in one important context; where the corporate program ignored politics, it was integral to the union's efforts.

The political circumstances under which the industrial unions emerged convinced Philadelphia's labor leaders that they could not rely simply on worker solidarity within a single factory or local. Union officials felt that wage earners needed to be a political force to challenge the predominately anti-labor Republican power structure in the city and to encourage further the development of pro-labor national political issues. In the community at large as in the factory, however, they faced cultural and social norms that reinforced the dominant political and economic systems. In particular, the community, ethnic, and familial ties that were so important to the working class at times impeded a full-fledged class perspective.\(^{27}\) Through the sponsorship of social and educational institutions, Philadelphia labor leaders in the thirties tried to develop a more class-conscious movement. Worker education,

\(^{26}\) Block interview; *Microphone*, 1934-1935; Bernstein, *Turbulent Years*, 102.

worker theater, youth programs, inter-union cooperation and union-supported housing helped create a sense of class solidarity that competed with the kin and neighborhood orientation of working-class life.

An important tool in the effort to refocus the identity of wage earners was city-wide worker education programs. Programs designed to reach all workers, organized and unorganized, lagged before the founding of the NRA and the emergence of the new industrial unions. Unlike the worker education programs of the twenties, which were designed to train small groups of leaders, labor activists hoped to attract the rank and file. The support of such New Deal agencies as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), in addition to the Philadelphia school system extension department and the YWCA provided the means for reaching a large number of workers. The Philadelphia Workers Education Project, funded by the WPA and led by an advisory committee of unionists and educators, sought to make worker education a "vital part of the Philadelphia Labor Movement."28 Classes met at the YWCA and YMCA, at ILGWU Hall, at Upholstery Weavers' Hall and at the Amalgamated Center. Rather than concentrate on a specific local, these programs brought together wage earners from a number of different industries. Union and nonunion workers from the clothing, electrical, textile, chemical, and toy industries studied public speaking, parliamentary law, current events, creative writing, health and social hygiene, and the origins of the American labor movement. Such classes as "Your Job and Your Pay," a study of practical economics, helped workers to recognize their importance economic contributions and encouraged them to make new social and economic demands.29

Public labor entertainments, which had played an important role in earlier working-class culture, gained a new importance in the 1930s. Recognizing that consumerism and commercialization had diluted class identity, Philadelphia labor offered union-oriented alternatives to middle and upperclass dominated cultural and social institutions. In-

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stead of commercial plays, Philadelphia workers could attend the labor-sponsored New Theatre, which produced plays such as “Sit Down,” depicting the auto workers’ struggle; “The Crime,” a story about a popular young organizer faced with leading a strike involving his best friends; or “Steel,” dramatizing the impact of trade unionism on a steel-worker’s family. Founded in 1934 as a cooperative, non-profit-making venture, the New Theatre was devoted exclusively to the interpretation of the lives and problems of workers. Besides presenting plays in Center City, the troupe took its productions to neighborhoods. Similarly, the Kensington Labor Lyceum offered “Labor Chautauquas.” These consisted of plays fashioned out of everyday life, mass recitations, and songs presented by the Brookwood Labor College players. A “vital labor movement will sing its own songs and produce its own plays, as well as know its own history and study its own economics,” counseled Chautauqua supporters.30 On an even more participatory level, through a WPA Labor Dramatics course, trade unionists could produce plays for their own neighborhoods or factories. Unlike popular movies which would “have us believe that workers overcome their problems by marrying the boss’s daughter,” worker plays taught that unionism was the key to a better life.31

Union-supported group housing was another mechanism that created bonds among workers from a variety of industries and enhanced a class outlook. Non-profit group housing posed a challenge to the dominant housing system and required a commitment to the community from each resident to be successful. In Philadelphia, the American Federation of Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers, with financial support from the Public Works Administration, sponsored the building of the Carl Mackley Homes in the Frankford section of the city. Named after a hosiery worker killed during a 1931 strike, the complex opened in January 1935. Although employment in the hosiery industry was not a prerequisite for tenancy, preference was given to unionized industrial workers. The Mackley Homes offered to its three-hundred residents

30 Couvares, “Triumph of Commerce,” 123-47, examines the way a “nationwide, centralized mass culture industry” undermined plebeian culture. ULR, Apr. 16, 23, 1936; TWUA Local 25, minutes, Mar. 24, Apr. 21, 28, 1937; Microphone, Mar. 1935; S. Pawell to Piore, Mar. 21, 1936, Education Department files, ACWA Phil. Records; “Annotated List of Pamphlet Material for Workers Classes,” 1938, 17-34.

laundries, a craft room, an auditorium, and a pool in a modern housing complex designed to encourage resident interaction. To the trade unionists, the Mackley Homes were more than just low-cost housing and constituted a cooperative community in which the "social, intellectual and even political potentialities" were enormous. If properly developed, the union believed "the power and prestige of the Labor Movement will be greatly enhanced." The tenants, by 1935, had established a Residents' Association, a library, nursery school, women's and boy's clubs, a newspaper, a playground, and several cooperatives including a credit union, a gas station and a grocery store. Dances, card parties, movies, suppers, and sports highlighted a busy schedule of social activities.

The spirit of trade unionism and class awareness permeated this housing development. The Residents' Association established a legislative committee and members heard lectures on topics such as socialized medicine and the Pennsylvania Security League. Similarly, the Women's Club, while involved in many purely social activities including ladies basketball and sewing and knitting circles, also devoted meetings to a WPA puppeteer satire on company unions, debated the problem of high rents, and sent delegates to the Pennsylvania state capital in Harrisburg to protest actions on the relief issue. Commitment to organized labor was such an integral part of the Mackley community that its members refused to tolerate nonunion activity from residents. According to group mores, strikebreaking was antisocial behavior and the project's management asked those involved in such activity to vacate their apartments.

Labor's devotion to a union-centered culture was not limited to adult workers. Labor leaders believed that public education at its worst preached anti-union doctrines and normally ignored trade unions altogether. Philadelphia unions proposed to remedy this situation through union-sponsored children's programs. Pioneer Youth of America, a New York-based, independent, non-sectarian body, worked through


local unions sponsoring free-time activity programs of camps, clubs, classes, and "junior" unions for children of workers. In addition to recreational activities, the sons and daughters of Philadelphia textile, garment and hosiery workers learned of the movements for peace, economic justice, and racial understanding. The study of the "nature of capitalist society" was to prepare children for an active part in its reconstruction through trade unionism. With similar goals, the Philadelphia Joint Board of the ACWA appointed a children's educational director, and in 1936 planned an extensive program of children's activities. It provided ballet and music classes, parties, dances and motion pictures. Attendance at such functions gave the youths some sense of the union's role. Trips to places of industrial and social significance were to give the children a "first hand acquaintance with industry and help them learn the meaning of working class." Neighborhood clubs, organized by union members, offered labor stories, dramatics, puppetry, music, crafts and discussions about such issues as the union label. The ultimate aim of this program was to make the children union conscious and proud of their class.

Cooperation among unions in times of either peace or struggle universalized the sense of union solidarity. Athletics and other forms of entertainment cultivated ties among Philadelphia unions. Union teams participated in the Greater Industrial League, until in 1937 the Philadelphia Industrial Union Council began an extended program of involvement in sports by forming the CIO Labor Sports League. Unions participated in each others' activities and provided financial support by contributing to souvenir programs. During 1937, for example, fur workers attended functions sponsored by the Hebrew Trades and the United Tobacco Workers Industrial Union Local 272. Additionally, they contributed to the Department Store Employees Local 1059's dance, the Fur Floor Boys June Festival, the United Electrical Workers' convention, and the ball of Leather Workers Local 30. Similarly, members of Upholstery Weavers Local 25 attended the

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34 Pioneer Youth's Statement of Purpose, pamphlet, ACWA Phil. Records; Yearbooks, Philadelphia Labor Institute, 1930-31 (Philadelphia, 1931); ULR, May 3, June 14, 1940. Pioneer Youth should not be confused with the youth organizations of the YMCA, the Pioneers, or the Communist Party's, the Young Pioneers.

35 "Suggestions for Children's Work in Amalgamated Clothing Workers Unions, Phil.," ca. Feb. 1936, typed report in ACWA Education Department files, ACWA Phil. Records; Herman Rubinstein interview.
United Wood Workers Local 37 annual victory ball and the annual dance of Branch 73 of the Hosiery Workers.\textsuperscript{36}

Such functions created a sense of cohesiveness among workers that enabled them to advance their economic goals more effectively. Of major importance was mutual assistance provided during organizing efforts. In July 1937, Upholstery Weavers Local 25 urged its members to give full support to the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Industrial Union’s drive to organize lunch stands and restaurants in Kensington. Similarly, during the campaign to organize the Budd plant, Auto Workers Local 813 asked United Electrical Workers members to urge friends working at Budd to join the union. Harry Block remembered passing out leaflets during this organizing campaign. Employees at the Philadelphia United Gas Improvement Company turned to the community of local trade unionists for help in attaining the closed shop. Beginning in May 1937, gas workers visited union meetings and gave lectures and radio broadcasts asking workers to admit into their homes only meter readers displaying the union button.\textsuperscript{37} The Microphone, the Philco union journal, frequently reminded members “to look for the union label, shop card and button.” In the same vein, business agent Hary Norwitch reminded members of ACWA Local 110 that while their union was strong, “it cannot be expected that we can get too far ahead of the others unless we...help spread the knowledge of the benefits to be derived from unionism and then proceed with other workers to a common goal.”\textsuperscript{38}

Inter-union cooperation became of even greater importance during strikes. Unions aided boycotts and contributed to strike funds. Throughout Philadelphia, for example, industrial unions provided money for food for 1600 members of Battery Workers Local 18551, carrying on the city’s first sitdown strike. At a meeting in August of that year, Upholstery Weavers Local 25 supported striking UAW Local 258 by refusing to patronize Chevrolet and Buick dealers and by giving

\textsuperscript{36} ULR, Nov. 12, 1937; Microphone, Aug. 1934; ILGWU No. 11, minutes, Nov. 2, 16, 1937; Fur Workers No. 53, minutes, Feb. 23, Mar. 15, June 1, July 27, Oct. 7, Dec. 6, 1937; TWUA Local 25, minutes, Mar. 10, Aug. 18, 1937.

\textsuperscript{37} TWUA Local 25, minutes, July 21, 1937; Fur Workers No. 53, minutes, Oct. 7, 1937; ULR, May 7, 1937; UE No. 105, minutes, Oct. 24, 1941.

\textsuperscript{38} Microphone, June 1935; ACWA Local 110, minutes, May 7, 1935; Harry Block to Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Feb. 26, 1984, in author’s possession.
contributions to striking Windsor employees and to strikers from Local 35 of the Textile Workers. Workers assisted more directly by walking each other's picket lines. Philco Union secretary Harry Block recalled that "we were active on everybody's picket lines. . . . The most active of all. . . were the girls because a cop would swing a club at a guy but not at a girl." In March 1935, two of Block's members, Pearl Ruby and Florence Jones, joined striking National Biscuit workers because they had "unionism at heart." Similarly, activist Ester Mitchell remembered volunteering to aid strikers at American Can and RCA in Camden.39

Trade unions, drawing on workplace successes and an increasingly vibrant working-class culture, moved naturally toward broader political campaigns. Much like the Knights of Labor's political thrust of the 1880's, CIO politics owed much to the cultural atmosphere of the labor movement. In the early thirties, unions that would become the backbone of the CIO moved decisively away from the AFL's voluntaristic political philosophy. They realized that the incentives for organizing gained from New Deal legislation could easily slip away. In November 1933, Charles Weinstein, manager of the ACWA Joint Board, stressed to members the importance of unity and of preparing for the time when the "money interests" fought back.40 In Philadelphia and elsewhere, industrial unionists tried to create a phalanx undivided by religious, ethnic, or racial differences to press for vital labor legislation and to elect representatives responsive to labor's demands.

Unions worked hard to translate worker solidarity into a political force, making politics an integral part of local activities. They appointed legislative committees and regularly discussed legislation and judicial decisions of importance to labor at local meetings. In May 1935, for example, ACWA Local 110 examined the impact on social legislation of the Supreme Court's ruling declaring the Railroad Pension Act unconstitutional. Weinstein, encouraging their interest, asserted "that only by Government Legislation will the working class as a whole benefit." Efforts to politicize workers at the Philco plants in-

39 Esther Mitchell interview; Block interview; TWUA Local 25, minutes, Jan. 13, Aug. 4, 1937; Microphone, Mar. 1935.
40 Leon Fink, Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics (Urbana, Ill., 1983); Esther Mitchell interview; Green, World of the Worker, 133-73.
cluded periodic debates on issues such as unemployment and social insurance. Philadelphia locals regularly organized telegram and letter campaigns aimed at state and national legislators and participated in mass meetings to dramatize their demands. Typical was a union-orchestrated demonstration held on April 16, 1935, to support bills establishing the thirty-hour work week and outlawing company unions. Employing such techniques two years later, Philadelphia AFL and CIO unions joined the fight for President Roosevelt’s plan to enlarge the Supreme court.

At times, the political involvement of Philadelphia unions extended beyond domestic issues. Some expressed their internationalism through concern for foreign workers suffering under repressive political regimes. As early as 1933, Philadelphia clothing workers decided to boycott German goods. In February of the following year, the ACWA staged a meeting to protest the Austrian government’s actions against workers. The left-wing Fur Workers regularly discussed the Spanish Civil War, and its members were active in support organizations, including Trade Union Relief for Spain, Medical Bureau to Aid the Spanish Democracy, and the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The union contributed to disabled veterans and placed collection barrels for donations of food, clothing, and medical supplies in the local headquarters. Similarly, upholstery weavers gave money and promoted mass meetings supporting the anti-fascist forces in Spain. Unions with large Jewish memberships worried about their brethren in Europe and were active in the People’s Committee Against Anti-Semitism and Fascism or other similar groups. In 1934, ACWA Local 110 sent resolutions to the German ambassador to the United States protesting Germany’s treatment of Jews and demanding the release of political prisoners. At the same time, fur workers contributed a day’s pay to assist Jewish refugees.

41 ILGWU No. 15, minutes, June 6, 19, 1939; Microphone, Mar. 1935; ACWA Local 110, minutes, May 7, 1935, Apr. 4, 1933; “Suggestions for Branch Legislative committee,” prepared by Lawrence Rogin, education director, American Federation of Hosiery Workers, typewritten memo, Barkas Papers; Rubinstein interview.


43 ACWA Local 110, minutes, Oct. 17, 1933, Feb. 20, 1934; Fur Workers No.53, minutes, June 10, July 13, Aug. 19, Oct. 7, 23, Dec. 6, 18, 1937; TWUA Local 25, minutes, Apr. 7, May 12, 1937.

Public demonstrations alone, however, could not ensure passage of favorable social legislation or influence American foreign policy. Electoral success more directly assured a government supportive of organized labor's goals. Philadelphia unions, while at times attracted to alternative political movements, joined the New Deal Democratic coalition, playing a critical role in the Democratic resurgence in the city. Prior to 1932, the Republican machine dominated Philadelphia politics at all levels. In that year, however, the Roosevelt landslide drew Democratic candidates into the state legislature. Although the Republican's retained control of city offices, Democratic strength grew throughout the 1930s, posing the first true challenge to the Republican organization. In 1934, Philadelphians helped elect the first state Democratic governor in forty years. Two years later they elected thirty-eight of forty-one Democratic candidates to the first Democratic-controlled state legislature in the century.

Crucial to the success of the New Deal coalition were the contributions of organized labor. During the 1936 election, for example, Philadelphia CIO unionists provided much of the legwork necessary to mobilize working-class voters against the Republicans. Under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Labor Non-Partisan League, members of the ACWA helped with an intensive voter registration drive and campaign rallies, and it served as poll watchers. The Amalgamated's Women's Activity Committee devoted itself to the League during the election. Women clothing workers ushered during political meetings, distributed literature, and participated in other volunteer campaign work. Unionists believed that it was through their efforts that Roosevelt carried the city by 210,000 votes. Even South Philadelphia, a Republican bastion, but also the home of a large number of garment workers, went for the Democrats. Although unions less successfully flexed their political muscle during the 1938 city elections, they had enough influence to pressure the Republican-dominated city council to appro-


appropriate the municipal funds necessary to qualify for WPA and PWA federal grant money. Political power, then, was the capstone of the attempt to build a union culture in depression-era Philadelphia.

The question remains, how much of the unions’ programs actually reached the rank and file? Union leaders were often forced to prod reluctant members to become involved in union activities. Philco union education chairman Norris Kreider, for example, reminded workers that “Your Union is anxious that you should take advantage of every opportunity offered,” urging them to register for a class or join an athletic program. Some workers, however, were simply unwilling to participate. In one case, members of ACWA Local 110 were required to buy two tickets to their annual ball. Instead of attending, many members, despite entreaties from the union ball committee, sold their tickets. Labor historians are increasingly finding that many workers remained tied to neighborhood and kin networks, and that the industrial union upsurge had little impact on their lives. For example, veteran Philco union members Sally Cohen and George “Chick” Wentz recalled that conditions improved in the plant after the coming of the union but remembered little about the extra-curricular or political activities of the union. An additional issue is to what degree the union leadership was genuinely committed to involving the rank and file. While some leaders sincerely desired to develop contact with shopfloor workers, others may have seen unionism as a manipulative mechanism for maintaining their salaried position in the union.

Nevertheless, by the late 1930s, some Philadelphia unionists believed that they had taken important steps toward increasing their members’ commitment to their unions. Furthermore, they had stimulated a labor-oriented political awareness. For some workers the union

48 Microphone, Oct. 1935; ACWA Local 110, Ball Committee, minutes, Nov. 30, 1937; Sally Cohen and George “Chick” Wentz interview.
had become a central part of their lives. In the words of ILGWU President David Dubinsky, the "union holds in [their] mind the place once held by the community center, and the union leaders combine the old-time functions of the priest, the doctor and the precinct captain." 49

Efforts to maintain a vibrant union culture began to falter with the coming of the Second World War. Mass participation of the workforce lost its importance to many union leaders after the government offered maintenance of membership contracts in exchange for a wartime no-strike pledge. With management deducting dues from the workers' paychecks, a highly-involved membership no longer seemed necessary or even desirable to the increasingly bureaucratized leadership. While union leaders strengthened their organizations, their enforcement of the no-strike pledge aligned them with management against the rank and file. Some unions reduced or dropped their social and cultural programs altogether. 50

At the same time, newly prospering companies expressed a renewed interest in providing leisure activities and social welfare programs within a corporatist framework. Surviving union-backed recreational or educational activities were often stripped of political content as unions lost interest in promoting broader social goals. Other factors also contributed to the decline of union culture including: the dismantlement of the WPA which had staffed and organized many union programs, the postwar exodus of workers to the suburbs which made it increasingly difficult for unions to attract members to any extra-curricular activities, and the postwar decline of Philadelphia's industrial base which reduced the size and strength its unions. Moreover, an unfavorable political atmosphere after the war made it difficult for unions to pose any sort of alternative culture. The recent destruction of the ACWA's Philadelphia headquarters, the Amalgamated Center,

49 ULR, May 13, 1938.
50 Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II (Cambridge, 1982), passim; Stan Weir, "The Conflict in American Unions and the Resistance to Alternative Ideas from the Rank and File," in James Green, ed., Workers' Struggles, Past and Present: A 'Radical America' Reader (Philadelphia, 1983), 251-68, examines the impact of the war and how union institutionalization weakened rank-and-file militancy. While labor leader may have lost interest in enhancing a union-oriented culture, workers continued to build informal social networks, on and off the job, that helped pressure the union as well as resist the company; see Dorothy Fennell, "Beneath the Surface: The Life of the Factory," in Ibid, 301-10, and John Lippert, "Shop-Floor Politics at Fleetwood,: Ibid., 348-52.
which had once served as "the center for the members' recreational and cultural life, the backdrop for many activities of study, play, dancing, singing, sports. . .every phase of the member's contact with his union,"\(^{51}\) symbolizes the more ingrown and defensive posture of organized labor in recent years.

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\(^{51}\) This paper does not intend to argue that unions have unilaterally abandoned worker education in the postwar era; rather their programs have more limited objectives than those of the 1930s.